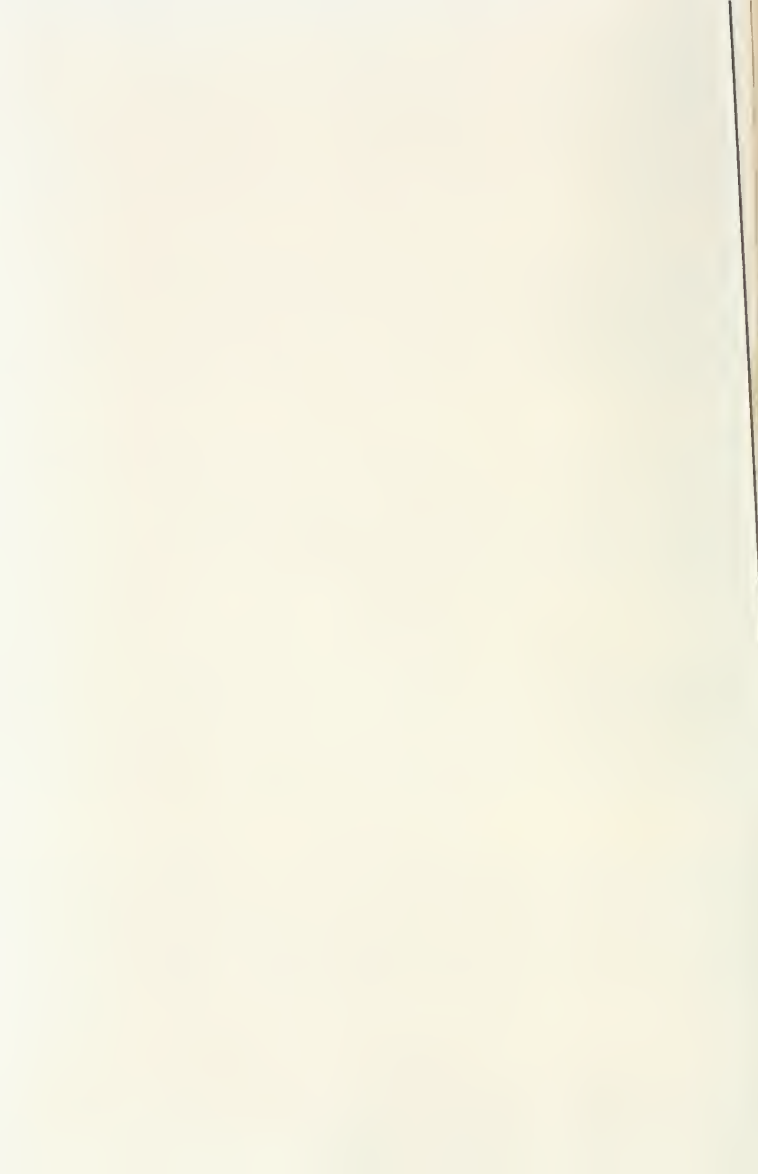




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GERTY.

"Eye hath not seen nor ear heard aught of the country where Ada is now. How faithfully her memory and her love are kept by the friend she left behind."—
Page 336

ADA AND GERTY;

OR,

Hand in Hand Heavenward.

By

LOUISA M GRAY.



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ADA AND GERTY.

CHAPTER I.

HANDS JOINED FOR THE FIRST TIME.

T was a sunny day in the end of April when Gerty Stuart first went to school at Miss Martyn's; and it seemed to her, in her misery and homesickness, as if the bright weather mocked her. She was only eleven years old, poor child! and had never been away from home before; and though her father's house was not many miles out in the country, she felt it very far off then. Her mother kissed her and bade her good-bye in Miss Martyn's prim drawing-room; then Gerty heard the hall door shut, and the cab drive away to the station. She was alone in a new world.

There was a large mirror just opposite her, which reflected the stiff, handsome furniture, and her own disconsolate little figure sitting all alone on the sofa: a plain child, looking almost boyish with her rough jacket and short-cut hair. Miss Maria Martyn had left the room with her mother, so she was quite by herself, but she struggled hard to keep from crying—not so much from bravery or pride,

as from a feeling that once begun she would not be able to stop. And when Miss Maria came back, she found Gerty sitting motionless, looking straight before her with her mouth tight shut. Miss Maria thought she looked rather stupid and sulky, and spoke very coldly when she said she would take her to her room ; while Gerty in her shyness felt the greatest awe of the tall dark-eyed lady, who was the first of her governesses she had seen.

She rose without speaking, or even daring to lift her eyes, and followed Miss Maria to a large, bright room looking out on gardens at the back, which was much pleasanter than the drawing-room. Gerty's boxes had been brought up here, but she was told she need not unpack till after tea, when the elder Miss Martyn would show her where to put her things, and tell her which of the little iron beds was to be hers. So she had nothing to do but take off her hat and jacket ; then she followed Miss Maria down a long passage to the class-rooms. As she came nearer she was very much astonished to hear the merry sound of girls' voices and laughter. "How *can* girls laugh and be happy at school !" thought poor Gerty.

But the noise abruptly ceased as Miss Maria opened the door of a large schoolroom. In the middle of the floor was piled a huge heap of lesson-books, and round about the pile five or six girls were executing a fantastic and original dance. Several of the elder pupils, who were quite grown-up young ladies in Gerty's eyes, had turned round from their desks to watch and applaud ; and even the little French governess was looking on with undisguised amusement. When Miss Maria entered there was a general rush of the girls to their seats, the dancers giggling and pushing against each other in an alarmed way. Only one held her ground—a slender, brown-eyed child about Gerty's own age,

who had made a pause just opposite her governess, and still stood in the middle of the floor, spreading out her dress with her fingers. And on her Miss Maria's wrath first fell.

"Miss Godfrey, *as usual!*" said she, with a sarcasm which Gerty thought terrible, but which seemed to fall very harmlessly on the culprit.

"Mademoiselle, why do you allow this?" she continued, turning to the governess.

"It is ze first day, and ze young ladies have nozing to do," said Mademoiselle, coming forward and speaking in a deprecating tone.

"If any young lady has nothing to do," said Miss Maria sternly, "I will be most happy to give her something to do. Every one ought to have some employment, although there are no lessons to prepare for the masters. Ada, pick up all those books and put them in their places. As for you, I know you always employ your time in mischief, whether you have anything to do or not."

There was dead silence in the room now. The girls, in terror of Miss Maria's threat of "giving them something to do," had hastily got their needlework, or begun to write letters, with their heads bent low over their desks. Miss Maria walked majestically across the room, and introduced Gerty to Mademoiselle, who looked rather mortified at the reception her well-meant excuse for the misdeeds of her pupils had met with. All was quiet till Miss Maria swept out of the room again; then the naughty Miss Godfrey, who had been rapidly putting away the ill-used books in the desks, uplifted a huge dictionary and threatened to throw it after her retreating figure. Every one drew in their breath with horror, but happily the lady did not turn round, and after the door was shut there was a laugh. "Ada!

Ada!" cried Mademoiselle with pathos in her tones, "is it impossible that you can be good?"

"Quite, Mademoiselle," said one of the elder girls. "She couldn't if she would, and she wouldn't if she could."

"Thank you, Miss Carr," said Ada Godfrey, dropping a courtesy till her short dress swept the ground. Then she began to dance again; but Mademoiselle, who had been gravely pondering over Miss Carr's answer, was not in a mood to allow any more play.

"I do not understand you, Miss Carr," said she,—“but it matters not. Ada, I command you, sit yourself down and be quiet; I will not allow such noise.”

Ada accordingly seated herself at the desk next to Gerty's and began to write; while Gerty turned away, and leaning her elbows on the window-sill, gazed vacantly out. She was not accustomed to girl-companions, for she had no sister, and had always lived in the country, so she had no idea how to make acquaintance with her schoolfellows; besides, she was too miserable even to wish to do so. Silence and order reigned in the classroom now, and no one spoke for a long time, except Mademoiselle and some of the elder girls, who were gathered in a group at one of the windows, and talked together in French. All at once the company was startled by Ada falling flat on the floor, chair and all, with a noise that would certainly have brought Miss Maria back to the room, if she had been within hearing. As it was, Mademoiselle was seriously alarmed, and determined to execute justice immediately.

"Mademoiselle Ada, voulez-vous quitter la chambre!" said she in her sternest voice.

"Mais, Mademoiselle," said Ada, picking herself up, and replying in French which Gerty could not help thinking very curious, "ce n'est pas ma faute que j'ai tumbé."

C'est ma misfortune. Je ne pouvais pas l'aider. Je crois que je suis sérieusement blessée. Est-ce que vous n'avez pas pitié sur moi, Mademoiselle?"

"Quittez la chambre," repeated Mademoiselle firmly, taking no notice of the laughter of the other girls.

But Ada triumphed. "Il faut all of us quitter la chambre," said she coolly; "there's the tea-bell."

So all the girls trooped off two and two; Ada with the tall bright-haired young lady who had said she never could be good. Mademoiselle, satisfied that Miss Maria had not been in the near neighbourhood, was content to let the tumble, whether fault or misfortune, pass without further notice.

"We will go togezer," said the little Frenchwoman good-naturedly, linking her arm with Gerty's.

Miss Maria did not appear at tea, but the elder Miss Martyn presided at one end of the table, and at the other her mother, a very stout good-natured-looking old lady. The German governess, Fräulein Framm, sat opposite Gerty, who gazed with wonder at her broad face and colourless hair. The whole of the fifteen boarders were assembled; most of them much older than Gerty, who could only pick out one girl smaller than herself, a fat round ball of a child called Molly Smith.

But to poor Gerty's mind this schoolroom tea-table brought back the image of another, where her place was empty. "Mamma" would be home now; the little boys would have met her in the garden, and "papa" would have been waiting at the door; now they would be all together in the dear cozy parlour. Oh! what she would give to be there! The boys would miss her, she knew, and baby—how could they make him understand where his sister had gone? A great lump rose in Gerty's throat, and one or two

tears had fallen, when a little hand clasped hers under the table. She could not have borne a word of consolation just then, but Ada's first remark was eminently commonplace.

"We get jam to tea on Sunday nights, and bread and butter every other night. On birthdays we sometimes have a cake ;—what sort of cake do you like best?"

But Gerty was as yet unable to answer, so Ada chattered on. "I like gingerbread—gingerbread best of all cakes, and raspberry jam best of all jams. Strawberry jam is nice too. You're to be in our room, do you know? Nobody told me, but there's another bed put in our room, and you're the only new girl who has come this Easter. So I guessed it! Molly Smith is in our room, and Janie Leslie—that girl there with the green ribbons in her hair—she takes *such* a time to plait her hair at nights, and take it out in the morning! *Isn't* Miss Maria nice?"

This last question was asked very suddenly, and Gerty, somewhat taken aback, could only stammer out, "I—I don't know."

"Ah! you'll know very soon," said Ada, with a sort of wondering pity for Gerty's innocence. "She gave me twenty lines in the holidays, more than once!"

"Twenty lines?"

"Yes, twenty lines of French prose to learn by heart. Well, I *was* naughty, you know, but then I was so lonely."

"You didn't go home in the holidays!" said Gerty, aghast at such a dreadful idea.

"No, not just now. In the long holidays I go to grandmamma or my aunt in England. Papa and mamma are in India ; and in six years—when I am seventeen—I'm going to India too. It won't be very long now!"

"It seems a long time," said Gerty, who was not sure whether to consider Ada very brave or very heartless.

"It does seem a long time sometimes, but then I have letters,—and see here! this is what mamma gave me when she went away. This is mamma." And she touched the spring of a little locket round her neck, leaning nearer Gerty to let her see the picture in it, a tiny photograph of a pale, pretty lady, with soft eyes like Ada's own.

"Do you always wear it?"

"Yes, all night and all day. And I kiss it for mamma every day. I wrote her that in one of my letters, and she said she was glad. Miss Maria said she would be gladder if *she* wrote her that I was getting on well with my lessons, but I don't know about that. What do you think?"

"I don't know; but I'm very sorry for you," said Gerty, forgetting her own trouble in her pity for the girl whose parents were in India, and who stayed at school during the holidays. After a little she went on: "I don't know what I'd do if papa and mamma were far away. Burnside—our house—is only twelve miles from here. I'm going home every month."

Hand in hand the two children went back to the school-room together, Gerty's heart full of gratitude to this odd little comforter, who had come to her in her trouble. Gerty's nature was one of those which are apt to be content with loving a few friends intensely, and looking with comparative indifference on the rest of the world. Till now, she had been almost entirely wrapt up in her home-life, caring for no other companionship than that of her parents and brothers: now, when she was separated from them, she turned to Ada, in her loneliness, with a love which coloured all her school-life. Henceforth what Ada did was right, simply because Ada did it. As she had been the first in all the school to show Gerty kindness and sympathy, the mischievous tendencies Miss Maria had accused

her of, and her impertinence to Mademoiselle, which Gerty would very likely have blamed in any other girl, became amusing, and even praiseworthy.

For the rest of the evening the home-sick child was comforted, and she unpacked her things and arranged them in the drawers with a heart that was almost light. But when prayers were over, and the girls had all gone to their rooms, her troubles began again. That afternoon in the drawing-room, when Miss Maria had left the mother and daughter alone together, Mrs. Stuart had asked a promise from her little girl.

“And whatever the other girls do, my darling, will you read your Bible and say your prayers every night and morning?”

Gerty had answered “yes” without even thinking of it. Now for the first time she saw that there might be some difficulty in doing at school what she had been accustomed always to do at home. Janie Leslie had placed herself before the glass, and was engaged in the lengthened operation of hair-plaiting which Ada had spoken of. Little Molly Smith was seated on the floor, slowly unfastening her dress. Ada, comb in hand, danced and jumped about the room, as she related the history of her adventures in the holidays to the other two, who were listening with the greatest interest. No one spoke to Gerty, and she undressed quickly, and sat down on her bed to think. Even if she had courage enough to kneel down alone before her companions, how could she possibly read or pray in the midst of the romping and chatter that were going on around her! So she sat quietly on, and wished and waited for silence. But she wished and waited in vain. At last the servant came to turn out the gas, when Janie was just putting the finishing touches to her hair. Nobody was

undressed except Gerty, but the others seemed to find nothing very unusual or disagreeable in going to bed in the dark: only Janie grumbled a little. But Ada and Molly went on talking and laughing till some time after they were in bed.

It was not till Gerty was sure they were all asleep that she slipped softly out of bed and knelt down in the dark. She did not think of the Saviour as a Friend who was always near, and could help and comfort her now when her father and mother were away, and she was alone among strangers. She had read and heard of the Lord Jesus all her life, but the story had very little interest for her; and though she always read a few verses of the Bible, and knelt to pray before she went to bed, she regarded it as rather a disagreeable duty. Still it *was* a duty, and she would be very uncomfortable if she neglected it; besides, there was her promise to her mother.

It was impossible to read now, but on her knees, at her bed-side, she repeated a psalm—the Twenty-third—carefully and conscientiously, but with very little sense of the meaning of the familiar words. Then, with her head bent, she whispered the Lord's Prayer, and the petitions for blessings on herself and her relations her mother had taught her long ago. But the mention of the dear names was too much. The tears Gerty had struggled against so bravely all day would no longer be kept back, and clutching the bed-clothes in her poor little hands, she sobbed and cried as if her heart would break. Utterly worn-out and cold, at last she crept back to bed, and drawing the blankets over her head, sobbed on till she fell asleep.

CHAPTER II.

DRAWING NEARER TOGETHER.



ERTY did *not* wake up next morning to wonder where she was. The miserable sense of being away from home continued even in her sleep, and she was not at all surprised when she opened her eyes to find herself in the unfamiliar room. She raised herself up on the pillow, and looked about her. The morning light was still gray, and Janie and Molly were sleeping soundly. But Ada, whose bed was next the window, had drawn up the blind, and was stretched on the top of the clothes, with her feet on the pillow, intent on a book. She did not look up when Gerty moved, and Gerty, afraid of disturbing the others, made no sign of being awake. Presently it occurred to her that this would be a good time to get her devotions over without being noticed or disturbed. Nobody moved as she got out of bed as softly as she could. It did not take very long to repeat her prayers and read a few verses, but she was conscious of hurrying through them, in case the other girls would wake up, or the servant come in to call them. As she closed her Bible she looked up, to see a pair of brown eyes fixed on her earnestly. Ada said nothing, however, but turned back to her book; and Gerty crept into bed, feeling vexed and ashamed, she scarcely knew why.

The servant appeared in a few minutes to say it was

half-past six, but it was some time after that before any one except Gerty began to dress. Janie Leslie was the first, and in a few minutes Molly tumbled herself out of bed on the floor, looking very cross and sleepy.

"Oh! I wish I was at home!" wailed she, as she drew on her stockings. "There I didn't have to get up till nearly nine, if I didn't want to."

"Of course we all wish we were at home," said Janie Leslie snappishly.

But Ada still continued reading; and at last, after the clock had struck seven, Gerty ventured to say,—“Haven't we to be ready at half-past seven? Won't Ada be late?”

Janie turned round from the glass, to look first at Gerty, then at Ada.

"Never mind her, Miss Stuart," said she, rather ungraciously; "you won't be so early yourself after a little. You'd better get up, Ada—Ada!" And then, as Ada neither spoke nor moved, she went on, "Where in all the world did she get that book, Molly?"

"Miss Carr," said Molly shortly.

"Well, it's very wrong of Mary Carr,—Ada, you're sure to be late."

But Ada was obstinately deaf, and it was not till Gerty was expecting the bell to ring for prayers, that she made a flying leap out of bed, and tossed her book into a drawer. Then she began to dress with a rapidity which moved the admiration of the new-comer; but, in spite of all her haste, she was not nearly ready when the bell rang, and the three other girls went off to the schoolroom.

"I told you how it would be," said Janie Leslie, as she shut the door.

But, happily for Ada, the ceremony of bidding good morning to Mrs Martyn and her daughters occupied a

little time; and, to Gerty's great relief, she appeared at last. Miss Martyn had just opened the Bible when the audacious young person came in, and sitting down near the door, out of Miss Maria's sight, buttoned her dress during the reading of the chapter.

It was raining hard that day, and there was no walk in the forenoon, so after twelve o'clock, when morning lessons were over, Gerty sat down at her desk to write her first letter home.

MY OWN DEAR MAMMA,—I was very miserable yesterday. It will only be 28 days till I come home. I counted in my bed this morning. I think I shall like my lessons very much. We have French lessons from a French master and a French governess too. I got to the top of my English class for dictation. One of the girls had twenty-five errors. I like one of the girls very much. I am very sorry for her. Her name is Ada Godfrey. Her parents are in India. Mrs. Martyn is nice so is Miss Martyn. I don't like Miss Maria she is not nice at all. How are the boys. Give my love to nurse and Mary and Sarah and kisses to Freddy and Robbie and baby. Love to yourself. Good-bye.

Your affectionate daughter,

GERTRUDE MARY STUART.

P.S.—I forgot love to papa but I mean it all the same.

It was neither well-written nor well-composed, and the punctuation was defective; but Gerty had no doubt of the welcome it would receive at Burnside. Written in Gerty's large round-hand, it looked a very long letter, and her thoughts went back to it with considerable satisfaction in the evening when all her lessons were over.

It was damp and chilly, and a fire had been lighted in the large schoolroom, round which most of the girls were gathered, waiting for tea. Gerty, leaning against the mantelpiece, gazed into the fire, and thought over the events of the day, which had not been such a long one after all. She had got on well in her classes, and now that her lessons for the next day were all learned, she felt just weary enough to enjoy being idle for a little. Then Ada had told her that after tea the younger girls were free to play, and had all sorts of games in the schoolroom. To be sure, the thought of home always brought a pang; but then her letter would arrive that night, and her mother would be assured she was well, and not more miserable than was to be expected. School was not so intolerable after all, Gerty was thinking just then.

Suddenly Ada came up behind her, and putting her hands on the back of the chair, swung herself over Gerty's shoulder and asked,—

“And now, Miss Stuart, isn't Miss Maria nice?”

“Oh! don't call me Miss Stuart; I don't like it at all,” protested Gerty.

“No; of course you don't. Nobody calls me Miss Godfrey, except Miss Maria sometimes. When *Mademoiselle* is angry she says, ‘*Mademoiselle Ada.*’ But how can I call you anything but Miss Stuart, when I don't know your real name?”

“My name is Gertrude, but I'm always called Gerty. Gerty is what I like to be called.”

“Well, then, Gerty, isn't Miss Maria nice?”

“You're not going to get off, you see,” said Miss Carr from the other side of the fireplace.

“I don't want to get off,” Gerty answered indignantly. “I think Miss Maria is cross and nasty, and finds fault

when there's no need to. I don't like her at all, and I said so to mamma in my letter to-day."

"You said *that* in your letter?" said Ada, with dancing eyes.

"Yes, I did. Of course I did," repeated Gerty, in amazement at the burst of laughter with which this announcement was received. "I tell everything to mamma. What's the matter? Why are you laughing?"

Ada was jumping about the room in an ecstacy of delight, and the other girls seemed scarcely less amused. Gerty could get no explanation for some time.

"Poor innocent!" said one. "Serves Miss Maria right," remarked another emphatically. "How could you be such a fool?" asked Janie Leslie.

Mary Carr was the first to take compassion on Gerty, and explain. "Why, my dear child," said she, "don't you know that Miss Maria reads all the letters?"

Passion prevented Gerty from speaking for a moment at last she said, very vehemently, but in a choked voice, "I hate her—I do hate her with all my heart."

"Calm yourself," said another of the elder girls, rather contemptuously. "You must submit to it, like the rest. Ada, you needn't jump about in that absurd way; your friend has done Miss Maria no harm, only got herself into rather an awkward scrape."

"What will Miss Maria do, Kate?" asked Mary. "Will she consider it more dignified to take no notice, do you think? Well, I do say the reading of the letters is a most shocking shame; and if it goes on next year, I'm not coming back, that's all."

Mary Carr was a motherless girl, and much indulged by her father, so no one doubted her being allowed to do as she chose about leaving school.

"But what right," said Gerty, her voice still trembling—"but what right has Miss Maria to do anything so low and mean?"

"I quite agree with you that it is low and mean," said Mary Carr.

Kate M'Kenzie interrupted her, by saying something in German in a warning tone; but her friend was not to be silenced.

"I don't care who hears it, Kate; you won't stop my righteous indignation that way. I say it is a shocking shame."

"I think we have heard that remark before. It is the rule of the school that the letters are written on Saturday morning, and then given to Miss Maria to correct. There are generally a great many mis-spellings in the children's letters."

"There are none in mine!" said Gerty proudly; but Kate took no notice of the interruption.

"Very likely Miss Maria will think it beneath her to take any notice of what's in your letter, Miss Stuart, especially as it's the first one. But I advise you to find out the rules of the school, as it's rather inconvenient not to know them. Ada there will be able to teach you; she has been punished so often for breaking them, she ought to know them now."

"I *wish* I had never come to this horrible school!"

"Never mind, dear Gerty," said Ada, coming to her and stroking her hand; "we have a great many ways of posting letters."

"Which are all more or less deceitful," said Miss M'Kenzie, coolly finishing her sentence.

"Oh no!" said Ada earnestly; "everybody does it except Emily Gordon."

"What everybody does is not necessarily right, Pussy."

"Now, Kate, you are really too bad," said Mary Carr. "If we *are* deceitful, it is Miss Maria that makes us so; and you know that you yourself very often—"


"My dear Mary, I don't set myself up to be perfection."

When the other girls left the dining-room after tea, Miss Maria told Gerty to remain behind. The little girl fully expected to be taken to task for the contents of her letter, but the governess only said,—“Your letter was very ill-written, Miss Stuart, and blotted in several places. The next one must be better; and remember in future that Saturday is the time for letter-writing, and it is against rules to do it during the week.”

Gerty listened sulkily, and when Miss Maria had finished speaking, she went out of the room without a word. Ada was waiting for her in the passage, anxious to know what had happened. When Gerty told her, she said,—“You needn't be vexed, Gerty; we can easily get letters posted when the girls go out to spend days. The way is this,—You must write a short, proper copy-book letter for Miss Maria to see; and if you want to say anything particular, write another when she's out of the way.” Mary Carr was passing just then, and the words of her little favourite struck her with a painful sense of the truth of what Kate M'Kenzie had said. She stopped for a moment; but Gerty and Ada, intent on their own conversation, had gone into the schoolroom, and the elder girl quieted her conscience with the argument she had used in the afternoon: “If we *are* deceitful, it is Miss Maria that makes us so.”

CHAPTER III.

SOME GLANCES HEAVENWARD.

N fine Sunday afternoons it was the custom for Miss Martyn's pupils to spend the time between afternoon church and tea in the gardens. Though each of the houses in the terrace had a back gate opening into these gardens, the girls had them pretty much to themselves, and regarded the nursemaids and children who sometimes appeared as unwarrantable intruders. These Sunday afternoons were all the pleasanter, because the girls were generally only accompanied by Mrs. Martyn, an indulgent old lady, who was a great favourite with them all. Except when any of them happened to be ill, she seldom took any charge of the pupils, as she found enough to do in the housekeeping of the establishment. Ada had long ago nicknamed her Mother Hubbard; and when Gerty asked her why, had explained, "Because she's always going to the cupboard, you know. In the holidays I follow her about, and she goes from one cupboard to another cupboard, and takes out sugar, and sago, and tea, and all sorts of things. Oh! Mother Hubbard has very nice things in her cupboards!"

"Then she can't be exactly like the real Mother Hubbard," said Gerty; "for her cupboard was bare."

On the first Sunday Gerty spent at school, she had wandered away from her companions, and was lying on

the grass thinking. Her thoughts were not happy ones, poor child! Every remembrance of home was mingled with the bitter consciousness of her broken promise. For every evening had been like the first one,—with this difference, that Gerty had joined in the laughter and romping in her room; and in the morning she had never again wakened soon enough to read her Bible while the others were sleeping. So it happened that until to-day, when she took it out before going to church, her Bible had lain unused in her drawer. Gerty thought, with bitter self-reproach, that she had been growing wicked very fast since she left home. What would her father and mother say, if they knew she had given up the habit of her childhood? For it was only of her earthly parents Gerty thought, and not of that other Father up in heaven, who had done so much more for her. Yet her love for them was strong enough to make her resolve that, rather than grieve her father and mother, she would brave the laughter of the other girls—only it would be very hard. Perhaps it would be better to tell Ada first; then she would only have to encounter the surprise and ridicule of Janie and Molly in the evening. It was even possible that Ada would *not* laugh. At any rate, it was worth while to try the experiment of taking her into her confidence. And in the midst of Gerty's musings, Ada came running along the garden path, and sat down on the grass beside her.

When Ada appeared, Gerty's courage failed her. She said nothing for a little, and at last made up her mind there would be plenty of time to consult her after tea. Ada for once did not seem in a talkative mood, and it was Gerty who spoke first, though not about the subject which had been so much in her thoughts.

“What funny hair you've got, Ada! I see all sorts of

different colours in it besides brown ; there are gold threads and red threads."

"Oh no ! not really. Only when the sun is on it," said Ada.

"But my hair is always plain brown, whether the sun is on it or not," said Gerty, rather sadly ; "yours is very pretty hair, and it's nice and long too."

"Well, if you call it *nice* to be long,"—and Ada gave a vicious toss to the hair in question,—“it gives me a great deal of trouble to comb. You haven't half so much to do at night and morning, because your hair is short."

Gerty was silent, for this brought back her unpleasant memories. At last she said, speaking very fast,—“There's one thing I ought to do night and morning, and I don't. And I promised mamma I would, and I must keep my promise. I'm afraid you'll laugh, but I can't help it. It's to read my Bible every day ; I promised mamma I would."

Ada had turned round to Gerty, and was looking at her with grave eyes.

"And you've only done it once !" said she, reproachfully.

Gerty held down her head with a keen sense of shame. Ada had been watching her ; had seen her read that first morning ; and instead of wondering that she did it then, only wondered that she had done it but once.

"I'm very sorry," said she, penitently. "You didn't do it—and none of the others did. But if you won't laugh, it will make it much easier for me."

"I'll read with you, if you'll let me," said Ada. "There are Bibles in our seat in church, and I read them when the minister preaches, if I'm not beside Miss Maria. I think the Bible is very interesting. Mamma gave me a beautiful one before she went away, but grandmamma took it from me, to keep till I was older. She said I would spoil it at

school. Miss Maria said I ought to have a Bible, and she would get me one; but I suppose she forgot. But if you will let me read with you from your Bible, I would like it so much."

"Is your grandmamma a Roman Catholic, then?" said Gerty, who had heard that people of that religion were in the habit of taking away Bibles.

"Oh no! not this one. My Italian grandmamma, mamma's mother, was a Roman Catholic, though. Have you read much of the Bible, Gerty?"

Gerty nodded. "Most of it over and over again," she said.

"Then do you know much about heaven, Gerty? Do you know if children grow up there?"

"What do you mean, Ada?" asked Gerty, in utter amazement.

"My little sister has been in heaven a long time. She was quite a little baby when she died; but if people grow up there, she will be almost as tall as I am, for she was only a year younger. And I've looked in the Bible to see if I can find out about heaven, but I never found much. Only I know it is a beautiful place, and Maud is there, for mamma told me so."

"It doesn't say anything in the Bible about people growing up in heaven," said Gerty, feeling uncomfortable in her new character of religious teacher. "But it says that everybody is happy there, and everybody is good."

"Yes; I know that," said Ada quickly. "Nobody but good people go there, except babies. I know that very well."

Somehow the thought seemed to annoy her, for there was a cloud on her face, and she began plucking up the grass and daisies with impatient fingers.

"Ada," said Gerty, after a pause, "I've got a Testament

as well as a Bible, and they're both with me here. You can have my Bible to read when you want a whole Bible, but you must take the Testament to keep. Then we can read there at nights, and it will be much more convenient. "It's not the least use to me. I don't care for it a bit," added she, trying to make her gift seem of no value, as well-meaning little girls generally do when they make a present.

"Thank you, Gerty," said Ada, accepting immediately.

They sat quiet after that till Mrs. Martyn passed, and called out to them that it was very unsafe to lie on the grass so early in the season. Ada rushed after her to say,—

"Dear Mrs. Martyn, what sort of jam are we going to have for tea? Do let it be raspberry! You have so many pots of raspberry jam in your cupboard, I know."

Gerty followed slowly and gravely, but nevertheless feeling much relieved by the unexpected turn things had taken.

In the evening, when the little girls had both undressed, Gerty fetched out her Bible and Testament, and Ada sat down beside her on her bed. Janie and Molly stared at them with great curiosity; but Ada was quite equal to the occasion. "You two must be quiet," said she imperiously; "Gerty Stuart and I are going to read the Bible." Janie muttered something inaudible, and Molly sat open-mouthed with astonishment.

"Shall we begin Matthew?" asked Gerty. "I was reading in Luke, but we had better begin something quite new."

"Isn't Matthew the beginning of the Testament?" said Ada. "Yes, let us begin there; and we'll read aloud, verse about. You begin, Gerty."

"Yes; but we had better not read all these names!"

“Oh yes, we will! Of course we will! We must begin at the very beginning.”

Gerty yielded, and they read from the beginning of the chapter,—Ada taking great pains with the genealogical names, repeating them over and over again, till she arrived at a pronunciation which satisfied her. And the other two bore it all in silence that first night, even when Ada insisted on reading two chapters. But on Monday evening, when Gerty and Ada again took out their Bibles, Janie's patience gave way, and she began whispering to Molly.

“Be quiet!” said Ada, stopping in the middle of a verse.

No answer was given, but the whispering changed to loud talking, and presently there was a laugh. Then Ada turned round again.

“Do you mean to be quiet?” she asked.

“We've just as much right to talk as you have,” said Janie.

“*Will* you be quiet?” said Ada, more emphatically.

“No, indeed! we won't,” said Janie; while Molly Smith, seated on the floor, repeated stoutly, “No, we won't!”

“Then I know what I shall do;” and Ada made a spring from her bed and opened the door, before Janie and Molly could ask in alarm, “Ada, Ada! where are you going?”

“Upstairs to Miss Maria's study, to tell her you won't be quiet to let Gerty and me read the Bible.”

“But, Ada, what do you mean? Stay, Ada, I say—Ada!”

The little figure in her night-dress made a pause at the door, with the handle in her hand, and one bare foot in the passage.

“Will you be quiet, or shall I go upstairs?”

“You're not going to be like Emily Gordon. Of all people, to begin telling tales—Ada, for any sake stop! Come back, Ada!”

"Then will you be quiet?"

"Read if you like," said Janie sulkily. "I'll be quiet, if you're going to make such a fuss. Only don't be long."

"Oh yes, yes! we'll be quiet, if you won't tell!" said Molly, shaking with terror.

"Very well then," said Ada, shutting the door. "Gerty, we'll go on."


Janie Leslie did not fail to buzz abroad in the school that Gerty Stuart and Ada had taken to reading the Bible at nights. And there was some laughter at their expense, and a few sneers, which annoyed Gerty a good deal. But most of the girls took their part, especially after Miss Carr had announced her opinion, which was very decided, as Miss Carr's opinion always was.

"I hate all humbug, but I do say every girl ought to read her Bible; and if any girl doesn't, she ought to be ashamed of herself."

So Janie Leslie was silenced, and bore the nightly reading with a sort of sullen patience. As for Gerty, her mind was quite at rest about herself, as she thought she had quite checked the wicked tendencies which had alarmed her so much. And except when Ada startled her with some odd question, she read her Bible with as much indifference as she had ever done at home.

CHAPTER IV.

A WEARY TRAVELLER ON THE NARROW WAY.

MILY GORDON was perhaps the most unpopular girl in the school, and Gerty had taken up the general prejudice against her. She was a pale, delicate girl of fourteen, who stooped very much, and was always unfashionably, and even oddly, dressed. Painfully shy, she kept aloof from the other girls as much as possible, and scarcely ever spoke to them, except when it was absolutely necessary. During lesson-hours she pored over her books, and was so nervously anxious about her studies, that she often brought on severe headaches. And in the evenings, when the other girls were romping, she never joined in their games, but sat alone in a corner, sometimes doing nothing, oftener still wearily looking over the lessons she had already conscientiously learned.

When Emily first came to school, a few months before Gerty's arrival, she had made timid overtures of friendship to her companions; then she had given them deadly offence, and had never been forgiven.

There was going to be a grand feast at night in one of the bedrooms; the eatables had been all purchased, and the guests invited, Emily Gordon among the number. But, to the surprise and indignation of the girls, she not only refused, but tried to persuade the others to give up the plan. And when they would not listen to her, she went

in tears to Miss Martyn and revealed the whole. Then poor Emily, who had tried to do right for conscience' sake, found herself disliked and avoided on all hands. After a while she gave up all attempts to conciliate her school-fellows, and kept quite by herself, which she could do more easily as she slept in a room alone.

Ada was the only one of her companions who had ever shown the desolate girl any kindness. One evening Emily, ill with a racking headache, had gone to lie down in her room, which was next the large schoolroom. Ada had then declared that, as noise was the worst thing for headache, there was to be no noise that night—blind-man's-buff and all romping games were to be given up. There was some opposition, but she had her way at last. Miss Martyn, alarmed at the dead silence, which she was afraid meant mischief, looked into the schoolroom after a while, and found all the children gathered round Ada, who was relating in a low voice the story of the life and adventures of that wonderful princess, Snowdrop, who "lived in the glen with the seven wee men." Emily heard what had happened from Miss Martyn, and next day thanked Ada with tears in her eyes. Afterwards she often watched her wistfully; and though she seldom spoke to her, she always seemed vexed when Ada got into trouble.

Emily Gordon was in a higher class than Gerty and Ada; and Gerty never exchanged a word with her until more than a fortnight after she had gone to school. All the information she had obtained about her was from Janie Leslie, who was exceedingly fond of telling stories about her companions, especially if they were ill-natured ones.

One Saturday, Gerty had written a short, stiff letter to her mother, which she had delivered to Miss Maria; and also another to her brother Freddy, a foolish, affectionate

letter, full of home jokes, which she was very anxious to post privately. Accordingly she consulted Ada, when they were in their own room dressing for a walk.

"I'll tell you one jolly way," said Ada. "At the end of that street behind the gardens there is a pillar post-office. We give all our letters to one of the two girls who walk first, and the pillar is just round the corner, you know. Round goes the girl, and in pop the letters before Miss Maria, or whatever governess is at the tail of us, has time to get round and see what's going on. But we won't be able to do that to-day, for Mademoiselle is going with us, and she never goes that way. Some of the girls who are going out to visit will post your letter, though."

"They're all gone," said Janie Leslie; "Gerty ought to have looked after it sooner."

"O Gerty, I'm so sorry!" said Ada, in pity for Gerty's disappointed face. "Are you sure they're all gone, Janie?"

"Emily Gordon isn't gone; but you needn't ask her, unless you want Miss Maria told."

"I think we'd better not ask Miss Gordon," said Gerty, rather regretfully; "I think she looks disagreeable."

It never occurred to Gerty that Emily had fits of homesickness as well as herself, and that they were harder for her to bear because she had no friends at school.

"Oh no! I don't think she's disagreeable," said Ada. "I'm sure she isn't. Let us ask her to post your letter for you; I know she will." And Ada as usual prevailed.

Emily Gordon, in her walking dress, certainly looked rather an odd figure, when Gerty and Ada burst into her room. Her hair was plaited and tied behind in an old-fashioned way; and she wore a broad-brimmed hat, and a very long jacket over the plain skirt of her brown dress. Nobody could have mistaken her for anything but a lady

in spite of her unbecoming costume; but she certainly made an unfavourable contrast to Ada, with her flowing hair and pretty print dress; and even to Gerty's sturdy little figure, clad in frilled alpaca.

Emily seemed decidedly embarrassed when her visitors appeared, and Ada began immediately, "Will you do me a great favour, Emily?"

"Yes, dear, if I can," said Emily, very gently; "but I will come and talk to you in the passage. You know Miss Maria does not like us to go to each other's rooms."

"We must speak low, then," said Ada, going out of the room backwards, and looking carefully up and down the lobby.

When they were, all three, outside the door, Gerty produced her letter, and said,—

"Will you please post this for me, Miss Gordon?—if it's not too much trouble, I mean."

"Please do," pleaded Ada, as she saw Emily colour and hesitate.

"I'm very sorry," said Emily, "I can't do it; it is not allowed—it would be wrong."

"Come away, Ada," said Gerty. "There's no use of wasting time. I told you Miss Gordon was disagreeable, and you said she wasn't. I was right, and you were wrong. Come away!"

But Ada was not going to give up so soon. She took the letter from Gerty, and trying gently to push it into Emily's hand, said in a coaxing tone,—

"Gerty would like it posted so much. It's a letter to her little brother, a funny letter, and she doesn't want Miss Maria to read it. You *will* post it, won't you, dear Emily?"

"I would like to do something for you, Ada," said Emily,

with a wistful look in her eyes. "I think I would do almost anything for you—only not that."

"Then you really won't?" said Ada, taking her hand out of Emily's, and standing straight before her, holding the letter.

"No, dear; it wouldn't be right." Emily spoke very low, but quite firmly.

"Then there goes the letter!" said Ada, in a passion, suddenly tearing it into little pieces, and throwing them on the floor. "Pick up the bits, and carry them to Miss Maria when you go to tell her."

She rushed down the passage like a whirlwind, while Gerty, almost as angry, collected the remains of her unfortunate letter.

"Please don't think I'm going to tell Miss Maria!" said poor Emily, who was in tears by this time.

"I don't care whether you do or not," said Gerty, walking off.

Neither Gerty nor Ada had the least idea what it cost Emily Gordon to refuse the first favour any of her school-fellows had ever asked her, and offend the only one among them who had been kind to her. And the indignation she roused was not that of Gerty and Ada only. In the afternoon Miss Carr asked,—

"What was the matter with you children this morning? I met Puss flying along the passage like—I don't know what; and a little after her came Gerty Stuart, with a red, angry face and clenched hands. I felt quite alarmed."

"Oh! it was Emily Gordon!" said Janie Leslie. "She wouldn't post a letter of Gerty's, though she and Ada begged her to. She said it was wrong!"

"What a goody girl she is!" said Mary; "I've no patience with people whose religion consists in being unlike other

people. What good does her mother think it does to dress her in that absurd way? And she's all on a piece. To do right, means to do exactly the opposite of what other people do, according to Emily Gordon. I wonder what she'll write in her diary to-night?"

Ada was sitting beside Mary listening attentively, and she asked eagerly, "Does Emily keep a diary then?"

"I've no doubt of it, Pussy. All these people do."

"Oh! what fun if we could get hold of it!" cried Ada. "We would write notes in it, wouldn't we, Gerty?"

"*Rather*," said Gerty, who felt it would be a pleasure to do something to annoy Emily.

"Oh! you'll never get it! Depend upon it, it's safe under lock and key," said Mary Carr, rising and taking out her music. "Are you in the humour for our duet this afternoon, Kate? We had better practise it, for there's to be a party some day soon, and we are sure to have to play it."

"There's to be another party, is there?" said Kate, as she followed her friend out of the room. But when the door was shut she said gravely, "Mary, what makes you talk so before these children? I really wish you would take care of what you say!"

But neither of them had the least idea of the mischief the foolish words had done.

CHAPTER V.

A TERRIBLE FALL FOR ADA AND GERTY.



THE party which Mary Carr had foretold did not take place till several weeks had passed, and Gerty's first monthly visit to Burnside was over. It came at last, however; and it happened on a Friday evening, as parties at school generally do.

Miss Martyn's parties were not much enjoyed by the girls, who were painfully impressed by the sense that they were not only expected to make themselves agreeable to the visitors, but to do credit to the school by their lady-like manners, and superior style of playing and singing.

On the evening of the first school-party at which Gerty was present, and which became to her for ever memorable, she found a corner near the door, where she sat down as much out of sight as possible. All the guests were strangers to her, and none of them spoke to the shy little girl; but for a while she amused herself very well by observing the appearance and manners of the ladies, and noticing, with even more interest, the different evening dresses of her schoolfellows. Gerty was not required to play, and she was very glad it was so, as music was the lesson she felt most behind in. Besides, she was very nervous, and was afraid she would have followed the example of Emily Gordon; about whom a doleful story was told, to the effect that being once asked to play at a party,

she had gone to the piano only to strike one trembling chord, and then fled weeping from the room.

Ada, who had a great taste for music, and could play remarkably well when she chose, was the only one of the younger girls who had been at the piano. Now, she had yielded up her place to Mary Carr, and was in the midst of a group of ladies, who were greatly pleased with the pretty little girl, who played so nicely, and was so frank and talkative. Nobody took any notice of Gerty, who began to feel lonely and sad. She was too generous to grudge Ada the praise and petting bestowed upon her ; but she thought sadly that things in the world were all wrong somehow, or she would not be pent up in this drawing-room, where her presence mattered nothing to any one, while two little boys in a nursery far away were feeling their games drag heavily because Gerty was not there. She knew the first symptoms of an attack of home-sickness, and fought against it bravely.

First, she tried to turn her attention to the pleasant prospect of the supper, which was to be at ten o'clock, and which the girls looked forward to as the only really pleasant event of the evening. Ada and Gerty had peeped into the dining-room in the afternoon, and gazed with delight and admiration at the table with its glittering crystal, and the magnificent trifle which formed its centre dish. Ada had even ventured near enough to be able to distinguish all sorts of sweet and tempting fruits ranged round about. Then they had hastened back to the schoolroom to bring the report of the goodly feast. But the supper-table seemed to have lost its charm for Gerty now, and there came to her mind a story from her little brother's last letter,—how that one evening nurse, forgetting that missy was away, had brought three biscuits and three cups of

milk before she took Freddy and Robin to bed. Gerty had laughed over the end of the tale when she read it, for Freddy related how he and his brother chuckled over nurse's mistake, and quietly divided the extra milk and biscuit before they told her what she had done. But it all seemed pathetic to Gerty now.

Still she would not give way to the wretched feeling that was creeping over her; if she could not occupy her mind pleasantly with the future, she must try to do it with the present. So she attempted once more to interest herself in the dresses of the ladies near her, and even counted the flounces on their skirts; then, when that diversion failed miserably, she turned her attention to the sonata Mary Carr was playing. But straight before Gerty's mental vision rose a picture of the nest-like green drawing-room at home, and her mother sitting at the cottage piano, playing softly in the lamplight. Things were getting desperate now, and, with a pitiful sense of being almost defeated, Gerty turned, as a last resource, to her lessons for Monday. Happily, she had a French fable to recite then, and she could say it over to herself. She had begun "*Le Corbeau et le Renard*" for the second time, when Ada's voice, close beside her, said,—

"Isn't this tiresome! Will you come and have some fun in the schoolroom?"

Gerty's heart leaped with a sense of deliverance. Her fits of home-sickness were always driven away by a talk with Ada.

Miss Maria and her sister were in the back drawing-room, and Mrs. Martyn, busy talking, had her head turned the other way; so, while Miss Carr and Miss M'Kenzie were thundering out their duet, the two children slipped unnoticed from the room.

They raced along the passages to the schoolroom with as great delight in their freedom as if they had been confined for days. Then they chased each other round the long table, until at last they paused out of breath, and looked about them. The great, bare room looked desolate enough, and wind and rain blew in at the open windows ; for it had been a wild and stormy day, unlike the ideal May weather. Ada shivered in her thin dress, then fetched out the large cloth used for wiping the chalk from the black-board, and folded it like a shawl over her shoulders.

"There's a duster for you somewhere, if you would like it," said she to Gerty.

"No, thank you ; I'd rather be cold," said Gerty. It never occurred to either of them to shut the windows.

They stood still for a minute looking at each other, uncertain what to do next. Then the light of mischief kindled in Ada's eyes. "Let us look for Emily Gordon's diary, Gerty ! Now is the very time."

In a moment Gerty had opened the lid of Emily's desk with a violence that sent it banging against the wall, and the four little hands were busy with its contents.

"O Emily, Emily !" said Ada in high glee, "I'm afraid you're sadly untidy, my dear. If Miss Maria were to see the inside of this desk, she would give you twenty lines. Here is a writing-case, Gerty ; the diary will be sure to be here. Never mind these lesson-books ; we'll put them in order afterwards, and Emily will think the fairies have done it !"

"Oh ! *will* she ! Perhaps she'll think the fairies have meddled with her diary too," said Gerty, who was in as high spirits as Ada, and thought this a capital joke.

Ada had carried the writing-case to the table, leaving the desk open behind her ; and Gerty followed with intense

interest. The writing-case opened easily, and out tumbled a quantity of paper and some letters, but no diary. Still they did not give up hope; and Ada chattered gaily on, but in rather a remonstrating tone,—

“Is it kind, now, to hide your diary this way, Emily? You are giving us a great deal of unnecessary trouble, dear girl! And if you only knew how much it would be improved by our notes—why, it would be twice as interesting, Emily!”

Gerty had pushed the paper and letters back to their place, and now lifted a little lid and disclosed a heap of silver, which formed a new theme for Ada’s address to the unconscious Emily, who sat in a corner of the drawing-room and dreamed not of what was going on.

“Oh! what a lot of money, Emily! If I’d as much money I’d have a feast—crabs, and rhubarb tarts, and almonds, and raisins, and ginger-beer. “Oh! it would be a nice feast!” and Ada smacked her lips at the very idea.

“But the diary, Ada!” said Gerty, who had turned back to the desk, and was impatiently tossing about the lesson-books.

“Oh! I’ll tell you,” began Ada. But there she stopped; for at that moment the door opened, and Miss Maria came in, with eyes that seemed to the terrified little girls literally to flame with indignation. They stood quite still, staring at her, unable to move,—Gerty at Emily’s open desk, Ada at the table with the writing-case before her. Miss Maria swept slowly up to them, the rustling of her dress the only sound in the room, and her awful eyes fixed on the culprits.

“What does this mean?” she asked. “Whose desk is that?”

As if the sound of her voice had broken a spell. Ada

made a sort of startled movement; but it was Gerty who answered,—

“Emily Gordon’s.”

“And what,” said Miss Maria, with icy clearness—“and what have either of you to do with Miss Gordon’s desk, or Miss Gordon’s private letters?”

She paused a moment, looking from one to another, then asked, “Was it Miss Gordon’s *money* you were looking for? Tell the truth, children. A lie doubles the fault.”

“Miss Maria! I don’t want her money, and I never tell lies,” said Gerty passionately. “We only wanted to see her diary!”

“Oh yes!” said Ada with great rapidity; “we only wanted to see her diary, I assure you.”

“You wanted to see her diary!” said Miss Maria with an accent of contemptuous disbelief. “Why?”

It was Gerty that answered again, and this time with a feeling that the explanation and excuse was a poor one.

“For fun,” said she in a low voice.

“You wanted to see Miss Gordon’s diary—for fun!”

Miss Maria made no other remark, but crossed the room, and rang the bell with a violence that made Ada start and shiver.

“Tell Miss Gordon to come here,” she said to the servant, who came in a flutter of astonishment at being summoned by the schoolroom bell.

Miss Maria and the two children awaited Emily’s arrival, in dead silence.

Ada had grown very white, and, trembling all over, she clung to the back of a chair as if for support; while Gerty, all her shyness overborne by pride and a sense of injustice,

confronted Miss Maria with indignant courage. Emily, troubled and perplexed, appeared at last, and her feelings of uneasiness were by no means soothed by the sight of the group in the schoolroom. There was no mistaking Miss Maria's character of judge, and Gerty and Ada with their defiant and frightened looks were evidently offenders; but her own open desk and disordered property bewildered her completely. Her first impression was that of wonder at the cluster round Ada's shoulders, which certainly formed a somewhat striking part of the tableau.

"Miss Godfrey and Miss Stuart have been examining your desk—in search of your diary, they say," said Miss Maria. "Will you be so kind as to see whether your property is all safe?"

But Ada had sprung forward with an impulsive movement, to do what Gerty would have endured any punishment rather than do,—make an appeal for help to the girl she had wronged.

"O Emily! you're a good girl; Miss Maria will believe you! Say you don't think we meant to steal your things. Say you believe it was only your diary we wanted!"

"My diary!" said Emily, in uncomprehending astonishment and distress; "I—I have no diary!"

Ada, whose eyes had been eagerly fixed on her, now flung herself on a chair, and covering her face with her hands, wept as if her last hope was gone.

"You are convicted in one lie at least," said Miss Maria. "Not another word, Miss Stuart,"—for Gerty, recovering from her first astonishment at Emily's words, was beginning again to try to justify herself. "How much money have you in your writing-case, Miss Gordon?"

"Seventeen shillings, I think."

"Count it."

Emily with trembling fingers began to do so; but so slowly, that Miss Maria impatiently took the money from her and counted it herself.

"Seventeen and sixpence," said she, flinging it down on the table. Then turning to Gerty and Ada,—“I am convinced that you intended to take at least part of this money, and would have done so if I had not come in when I did. You have already told me one falsehood, and I shall not tempt you to tell another by asking you more questions to-night. To-morrow, Miss Stuart, I will hear what you have to say, not at present. To-morrow, I hope you may be in a better frame of mind. But understand this, both of you,—that only after submission and confession can you remain in this house. If you still remain obstinate, I have no choice but to expel you; a painful thing for me to do, and what it will be to your parents I leave you to think for yourselves. But shocking as your conduct has been to-night, it ought not to have surprised me much. Ada Godfrey has been a disgrace to the school since she entered it, and it is only to be expected that her chosen friend and companion should be like her.”

“There’s no use of speaking!” said Gerty, with burning cheeks, and an expression of obstinate indignation about her eyes and mouth. Ada never even moved; only sobbed on in speechless despair. Tears were rolling down Emily’s face, but she was still too much bewildered, as well as too timid, to say anything. But Miss Maria meant to put an end to the scene. She had no doubt that, as far as she had gone, she had acted with the greatest discrimination and the most impartial justice. Now that she had convicted Gerty and Ada of their fault, and warned them of the consequences, she would leave silence and solitude to do their work; and if they were not successful

in bringing the children to penitence, she believed there was no hope for them.

Half an hour afterwards, Gerty, locked up in an unoccupied bedroom, was lying on the floor in the dark. The wondering housemaid had prepared the bed for her, and brought her night-dress; and while she was in the room Gerty sat straight on a chair and said never a word, though she was keenly conscious of her looks of pity. Miss Maria herself had come to put out the gas and lock the door upon her. And after she had gone, Gerty flung herself flat on the floor and gave way to her misery.

She felt, with a painful sense of shame, that she was considered too wicked to be with the other girls; even Ada was separated from her, and was doubtless crying in some other lonely room. And looking forward to the morrow, she saw neither hope nor comfort. She, Gerty Stuart, who had always been considered so good, who at home had almost never heard a word of blame, would be branded as a thief and a liar, and expelled from school before her first six weeks there were over.

For she had not the least doubt that Miss Maria would fulfil her threat. To be sure, the elder Miss Martyn was reported to be tender-hearted; but she was in delicate health, and had little to do with the school. Mrs. Martyn might intercede, at least, for Ada, whom she loved; but Gerty had heard too many stories about the absolute authority Miss Maria exercised over her mother and sister to believe that they would interfere to any purpose. To-morrow she would likely be sent home; and what a homecoming it would be! How could she bear to see her parents' shame and sorrow! And oh! most horrible thought of all, perhaps her mother would not believe her. It was possible, for everything had changed so much of late, that she, who

had never before doubted her little daughter's word, would think with Miss Maria that Gerty had wanted to steal Emily's money, and invented this curious story about the diary. Well! if that were the case, there was only one thing left for Gerty to do. She would go and drown herself, jump over the bridge she and her brothers crossed so often in their walks; then, when her dead and dripping body was carried home, they would be sorry they had not believed her. Perhaps even Miss Maria would be remorseful when she heard of it. For a long time she sobbed angrily over her own innocence, and the injustice that she felt was done to her. But after a while other thoughts came.

Even if her mother believed that she had neither told a lie nor tried to steal, what would she think of what she had really done? And here Gerty's fault rose up before her in its true colours for the first time. Out of mean spite against a girl who had never said an unkind word or done an unkind thing to her, she had broken into her private desk for the express purpose of prying into her secrets, and then annoying her by using them. Gerty could not yet acknowledge that Emily had been right in refusing to post her letter; but she knew well that it had been done from conscientious motives, while revenge had been taken for it in a way that would move teachers and pupils alike with disgust. She would not excuse herself, either, even in her own thoughts, by blaming Ada. Gerty never once said to herself that if Ada had not tempted her she never would have searched for Emily's diary; but she did think, with bitter sorrow, that if she had held back,—if she had said it was wrong,—Ada, in that sweetness of her nature which none knew so well as Gerty, would have given up the idea altogether. And now the end of it all was to be, that Gerty was to be separated from the first and only friend

she had ever made. After to-morrow, she would never see Ada any more, and her own foolish wickedness was the cause.

Poor Gerty longed with all her heart for some one to help and comfort her; some one who could understand all her feelings of sorrow and self-reproach, and be willing to love her in spite of what she had done. For the anger which had sustained her so long had all passed away, and left her with a weary sense of misery and loneliness. And all the time the Lord Jesus was waiting, ready to forgive, willing to comfort her, with a love more tender than her mother's, a sympathy more real than Ada's. Christ was with Gerty in the dreary, dark room, and she did not know it; her longing, troubled thoughts never once turned to him.

Gerty never knew how long she lay on the floor, but it must have been far on into the night. She heard the other girls go into the next room, where Miss Carr and Miss M'Kenzie slept, and it seemed to her that their voices were low and serious. Had they heard already, then, that Ada Godfrey and Gerty Stuart had been surprised by Miss Maria in the very act of carrying off Emily Gordon's money from her desk? Did they know that they were to be expelled to-morrow? And were they sorry? Gerty wondered; or did they think it a blessing that girls who could do so mean a thing should leave the school immediately? What did Janie and Molly think and say in the pleasant room where Gerty's bed and Ada's stood empty?

Not till every light was out, and the house had been long quiet, did Gerty rise, and begin to undress with cold, stiff fingers. She felt too wicked and miserable to say her prayers before she crept into the large, strange bed, which felt so cold and comfortless. If she could only sleep and

forget! But sleep did not come for a long time; and then only in snatches, broken by startled and troubled wakings. And before the earliest noise began in the street outside, Gerty was watching the daylight struggling in through the window with wide-open eyes—all hope of rest and forgetfulness gone.

CHAPTER VI.

MARY CARR PROVES A FRIEND IN NEED.

EARLY on Saturday forenoon, Miss Maria Martyn was sitting at the davenport in her tiny, snug study upstairs. A half-finished letter lay before her; evidently an important and difficult one, for Miss Maria was knitting her brows as if thinking hard on some annoying subject, and though she had several times dipped her pen in the ink, she had not written a word for some time. Suddenly her musings were interrupted by a knock at the door, and she turned round in astonishment as Mary Carr entered the room.

"I beg your pardon," said Mary hastily, for the study was strictly private, and none of the girls ever appeared there unless they were expressly summoned. "Mrs. Martyn told me to come here. I wished very much to speak to you."

"There is nothing wrong at home, I hope?" said Miss Maria, looking kindly at the pleasant face, which looked unusually troubled.

Miss Maria was much more successful with the elder pupils than with the younger, and Mary Carr and her contemporaries thoroughly liked and respected her. Unfortunately, her want of sympathy with children and children's feelings made her often misunderstand the little girls, and perhaps judge their faults too harshly.

"Papa is very well, thank you," said Mary Carr; "I

had a letter from him this morning. Everything is right at home. It is something quite different I have come to you about."

"Sit down, Mary," said Miss Maria, meaning to be specially gracious, for she seldom called her pupils by their Christian names. But she saw that the girl was vexed and embarrassed, and she wished to put her at her ease; so she left her davenport and her letter, and took a chair near her pupil.

"I wished to tell you that I'm afraid I've done a great deal of harm, though I didn't mean it," said Mary Carr, looking straight at her governess with her honest blue eyes. "Mademoiselle tells me that Gerty Stuart and Ada ran away from the party last night, and opened Emily Gordon's desk, and that you think it was her money they wanted. Now, I am sure they told the truth when they said it was only her diary they were looking for. I have heard that they are likely to be expelled, and so I have come to tell you that it was entirely my fault. Of course, I should have come to tell you at any rate—I don't mean I did it as a last resource," said Mary, suddenly correcting herself.

"I must say I do not understand you, Miss Carr," said Miss Maria, in her stiffest tone of displeasure.

"I don't mean that I intended to do any harm; but once, several weeks ago, the children were very angry with Miss Gordon for behaving in what we all thought a very absurd way. I remember I laughed a great deal, and made some foolish remarks—jokes about what Emily would do. And then Ada (she had been listening all the time) asked me if Emily had a diary. I told her I was sure she kept one; and I quite well remember Ada saying to Gerty Stuart that it would be fun to get it and write notes in it. I told them they never would get hold of it, but it never entered

my head that they would try! It was very foolish of me not to have kept my tongue before the children. Kate M'Kenzie is far wiser than I am; she spoke to me about it when we left the room. I laughed then, but it's no laughing matter now!"

Mary had not once faltered in her confession, and Miss Maria sat listening quietly. When it was finished she said,—

"Perhaps you can tell me in what Miss Gordon's absurd behaviour consisted?"

"I would rather not," said Mary, with a burning blush. Then she added hastily,—"It didn't concern me at all. And, Miss Maria, doesn't this make a better case for Ada and Gerty? Don't you believe that they told the truth when they said it was Emily's diary they were looking for, and that after all it was only a piece of foolish fun?"

Miss Maria considered a moment before she answered,—

"I believe, after what you have said, that it is possible the two children may have told the truth. But I also gather from your account that the 'absurd behaviour' of Miss Gordon was in some way connected with them. You may have made a better 'case' for them, but certainly not a good one, when you explain that the breaking into Miss Gordon's desk was a piece of revenge planned weeks ago. Stealing a diary is perhaps not so bad as stealing a purse; but I can scarcely call it 'only a piece of foolish fun,' even when I know it was first suggested by one of the oldest girls in the school!"

But Mary Carr was not to be daunted, even by the quotations from her own speeches, one of Miss Maria's most effective methods of striking terror into her pupils.

"I deserve what you say about me," said she with outspoken frankness. "You can't say anything harder to me

than I am saying to myself about my share in this business. But I'm sure you are mistaken about Gerty and Ada. I know less of Gerty Stuart, but I don't believe she is a child who would plot a mean thing for weeks, and do it at last. And Ada—I'm sure she wouldn't. None of us would ever believe that about her. You don't know how fond we all are of Ada, Miss Maria!"

"I am perfectly aware of that," said Miss Maria sharply. "And there can be only one opinion about the state of a school where a girl who is constantly in disgrace with the teachers is the most popular among her companions!" But Mary Carr looked so distressed and disappointed that Miss Maria softened, and added more kindly,—“But though I am annoyed by what you tell me about your own behaviour, I am much pleased by the frank way you have come to me. I hope this will be a lesson to you, not only to be more guarded in your words, but more careful of the influence you exert over the younger girls. I believe that much mischief that is done by the children might be prevented by you elder girls, if you chose to take the trouble.”

The girl who listened looked very grave, for her thoughts had gone deeper than Miss Maria's words. She was thinking that she had been doing very little during her school-life for the Master whose servant she wished to be. Impulsive and lively, she had gone eagerly into anything that promised fun; but she had always been equally earnest over her lessons. So she had found favour for herself alike from teachers and pupils; but perhaps after all her companion, who was laughed at and despised, was serving God better. Emily Gordon had not said one angry word about Gerty and Ada. She had come down in the morning sad and silent; but Mary had envied her feelings, for Emily could

pity the little girls who were in trouble, without the bitter thought that she had been to blame for it.

"I will try to do some good to the children, Miss Maria," said she at last. "Indeed I will!"

"I believe you, Mary," said Miss Maria; "and you shall have the opportunity."

Then she rose from her chair, intending to put an end to the interview; but Mary Carr was not satisfied yet. She was rather curious to know what the opportunity she was to have might be; but she had something more important than that to ask.

"Then you will forgive Gerty and Ada, Miss Maria?"

"I am willing to take as favourable a view of their conduct as possible; but their fault still remains a very serious one, and must be punished."

"But you won't expel them?"

Mary, standing with her hand on the door, waited so eagerly for the answer, that Miss Maria's face relaxed into a smile as she said, after a moment's hesitation,—

"I will not expel them."

"Thank you," said Mary gratefully; and made no other petitions in favour of Gerty and Ada, for she knew it would be useless to do so.

After she had gone, Miss Maria returned to her writing-table, but not to finish her letter. Without another glance at the contents, she tore up the half-written note and put it in the fire. After that she stood still for a while, gazing out of the window with an expression of relief on her face.

Every one was assembled for evening prayers when Gerty and Ada followed Miss Maria into the drawing-room. There had been a great deal of speculation among the girls as to whether they would appear or not, and now all eyes were

fixed on them. Ada, poor child! looked pale and ill, as if she were worn-out with crying; but though Gerty too was heavy-eyed, pride made her hold up her head and try to look as unconcerned as possible.

After prayers were over, the girls all rose to go; but Miss Maria had something to say first.

“I suppose you are all aware, young ladies, that two of your number have been separated from you on account of conduct so disgraceful that I hope and believe it is odious to all, even to the very youngest here. Miss Gordon’s desk was broken into last night, the contents of her writing-case examined, her money taken out. It was impossible at first to believe that this was done merely to look for a diary. But this morning one of the elder young ladies came forward in a very generous and noble way to try to shield Miss Godfrey and Miss Stuart, and take some of the blame of their conduct on herself. We believe her account, and are willing to hope that Miss Godfrey and Miss Stuart did not tell a falsehood, and that there was no intention on their part of taking Miss Gordon’s money; but, looking at it in the most favourable light, it still appears that their behaviour has been such as I hoped every girl in this school would have thought beneath her. If we believe that, as they themselves say, they only wished to gain possession of Miss Gordon’s diary (her supposed diary, for such a thing does not exist), we find that they first took the idea from a speech made in carelessness some time ago. No punishment could be too severe for the deceitful malice which would make two girls treasure such a hint for weeks, till they could find an opportunity of acting upon it by breaking open their companion’s desk. But I have determined not to expel these girls at this time, though they are not to be allowed immediately to associate with the other

young ladies on their former footing. For one week they will sit down alone to meals. For one week I forbid them to speak to their schoolfellows. And I forbid you all, young ladies, to say one word to Miss Godfrey or Miss Stuart during that time. Any necessary communication can be made through the governesses. And understand this,—that whoever disobeys me, or allows me to be disobeyed without reporting it, will have to learn two hundred lines."

When Miss Maria had finished there was a pause; then she turned round and said, "Good-night, young ladies," in her usual quick way. Ada was the first to come forward and hold out her hand, which, after a moment's hesitation, Miss Maria took. It was not her custom to bid good-night to the girls in disgrace, and Ada's movement was understood by all as an attempt at reconciliation.

But Gerty threaded her way through the group clustered together in the middle of the room, and went to the door without taking notice of any one. Emily Gordon was waiting for her there, anxious to kiss her silently if she might do nothing more; but Gerty did not even look at her.

She was half-undressed before the other three girls came into their room. Janie sat down immediately to plait her hair; and little Molly stared at Gerty and Ada with round eyes, and a very solemn face. Their silence irritated Gerty, though probably if they had laughed and talked to each other, as they generally did, it would have jarred upon her still more.

Ada took off her things wearily, then fetched her Testament and sat down on Gerty's bed in her night-dress. Gerty shook her head, but Ada was not to be put off. She went and brought Gerty's own Bible and put it in her hand. Then she sat down close beside her friend, and having found

the place herself, pushed back her unbrushed hair from her pale little face, and looked at Gerty, waiting for her to begin.

Then it was that Molly's tongue was unloosed.

"They're going to read their Bibles!" said she, in a loud whisper of astonishment.

Janie turned round a little, and looked at Gerty and Ada through her hair.


"They have much need!" was her only remark.

Gerty restrained herself with difficulty from an angry retort, but Ada did not seem even to hear. As Gerty would not begin, she herself read the first verse of the chapter, contrary to their usual custom. Gerty could scarce help going on, and so they read together as they had done before.

Then the two little girls put their arms round each other and kissed in silence, feeling that, even if they might not speak, there was comfort in holding fast together in their trouble.

CHAPTER VII.

ADA'S SEARCH FOR THE RIGHT ROAD.

HE days passed slowly on, and Gerty bore her punishment in grim silence. She showed a brave face before the other girls; and none of them, not even Ada, ever knew how she cried at nights, when the room was in darkness and her companions asleep. Her only pleasant time, in those days, was during lesson-hours. She had swiftly and surely worked herself up to the head of her class, and kept her place there in spite of the efforts of several girls who had been much longer at school. They very much resented her success, and she was by no means popular in consequence; but to Gerty it was a great satisfaction that, as far as lessons were concerned, her school-life had not been a failure. If Miss Maria spoke to her in her coldest voice, and many of her schoolfellows looked askance at her, still the English master generally prefaced a difficult question by remarking that he thought no one but Miss Stuart could answer it; and Monsieur Bornand was astonished at the correctness of her French translation. It was a pleasure to be in favour with her masters, but Gerty also thoroughly enjoyed her work for its own sake; her lessons interested her, and her success in her classes was as much owing to her careful preparation for them, as to the fact that she was far before other girls of her age in general reading.

Ada was with Gerty in all her classes, but sat at the foot as invariably as Gerty was at the head. She never learned her lessons when she could possibly help it; and if by answering some chance question she took a higher place in her class, she was soon sent back to her old seat for whispering, or trying to make the others laugh. But the difference of the little girls' tastes made no difference in their friendship. Gerty never thought herself better than Ada because she stood higher in her classes; and Ada admired Gerty's position without the least envy, or even a praiseworthy desire to imitate her.

During the first day that Ada was condemned to hold no intercourse with her companions, she looked so very sad that she excited much pity. When Gerty and she sat down to their meals alone at a little table, she hid her face in her hands and cried. To the great distress of Mrs. Martyn, she did not eat a morsel. But after a little her spirits rose; and not only did her appetite return, but she amused herself by making grimaces to her companions at the other table. She took full advantage of Miss Maria's permission to hold communication with the other girls through the governesses, and was constantly charging Mademoiselle with messages which it was quite unnecessary for her to deliver, as the people they were intended for heard them as well as she did. In her bedroom, Ada's attempts to make herself understood by signs kept Janie and Molly, and even Gerty, who was not very mirthful just then, in fits of laughter. One morning she puzzled them all for a long time. Over and over again she opened the wardrobe door and peered in; then ran away—only to return and do the same thing over again. At last Molly cried out, with a burst of laughter,—“Oh, I know! she means Mother Hubbard.”

Ada nodded her head vehemently in token of assent, but what she wanted to say about Mrs. Martyn, it was quite impossible to make out. It was all in vain that Ada took one of the pillows and stuck it full of pins, even carrying off one of Miss Leslie's much-loved brooches for the same purpose.

"Ada must learn the 'deaf and dumb alphabet before she gets into another scrape," said Janie.

But after they went to the schoolroom the whole thing was explained. Ada ran immediately to Mademoiselle, and said,—

"Will you please tell these stupid, stupid room-mates of mine that I'm going to make a pincushion for Mrs. Martyn on her birthday?"

"Ask her what it's to be made of," said Molly Smith, who was on Mademoiselle's other side.

"Be so kind as to thank Miss Smith for her kind inquiries, Mademoiselle," returned Ada, "and say it is to be made of canvas, and red wool, and crystal beads; and there's to be a fringe round it!"

"Tell Miss Godfrey, with my compliments, that I don't believe her pincushion will ever be finished," said one of the other girls.

Mademoiselle laughed good-naturedly; but when Ada began again, "Give my kind regards to Miss Ellen Murray, and say—" she stopped her.

"Enough, enough, my children," said she in French. "Ada, talk no more, but go and practise."

"*Tout droit*, Mademoiselle," said Ada, who had translated various slang phrases into French, and was very fond of annoying her governess by using them. When Miss Maria was present, Ada's French was very different from the jargon she generally practised on Mademoiselle and her companions.

The disgrace of the punishment, which Gerty felt so keenly, was nothing to Ada ; but, in spite of all her devices to evade Miss Maria's orders, the enforced silence was very terrible to her. When the dreary week was over at last, and another Sunday morning brought her penance to an end, Gerty opened her eyes very early to see a little white figure standing by her bed.

"Make room, please, Gerty," said Ada ; "I want to get into bed beside you. Don't you remember, we can talk to-day?"

Gerty rolled back sleepily, and when Ada lay down beside her she put one arm round her neck ; then her heavy eyes closed again.

"O Gerty ! don't go to sleep—I have so much to say to you. I've been thinking a great deal this week, though I haven't been able to talk. It has been a very horrid week, Gerty ; you've been looking miserable, and I was *very* sorry for you, though I couldn't say it. And now I've made up my mind that this will never do !"

Ada's last words were spoken with such determination that Gerty was fairly roused.

"What will never do, dear?" she asked.

"Hush ! speak low ; we mustn't waken Janie and Molly. When I was shut up in that dreadful room upstairs, Mother Hubbard came to me. Did she come to you, Gerty?"

"Yes," said Gerty with some hesitation. "She came on Saturday—at least she came to the door when I was lying on the carpet with my face the other way. She said, 'Are you sleeping, my dear?' and I never answered ; so she went away. I was sorry afterwards, for I wasn't a bit asleep, and I'm afraid it was wrong to let her think so. But I *didn't* want her !"

"O Gerty, what a pity ! Did you think she was like

Miss Maria? She isn't at all; she's very kind. She talked to me ever so much. She said it could be no real pleasure to me to be naughty; and do you know, Gerty, neither it is—at least not afterwards. And she said God would be pleased if I were to be good; and I would like him to be pleased with me, and take me to heaven when I die. I should like that very much, Gerty—shouldn't you? So I'm going to be very, very good. I'm quite determined; and I'm going to begin to-morrow."

"What are you going to do? Are you going to be like Emily Gordon?"

"I dare say I *shall* get like her, but not for a while, for she has been good a long time. But I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to learn my lessons, every one of them—French poetry and all. I won't play 'Polly Perkins' and 'I would I were with Nancy' in my practising times. I won't laugh loud out any more, because Miss Maria says it's unladylike. I won't say *Jamais esprit*, or *Tout droit*, or things of that sort to Mademoiselle. And in the evenings I'm going to work all the time Miss Maria is reading aloud. I won't make faces behind her back, either."

"That's for everydays—what are you going to do on Sundays?" said Gerty, in a tone that would have damped the ardour of any one less sanguine than Ada.

"Oh, on Sundays! I'm going to sit quiet in church. It's very hard; for sometimes when I'm very tired, and think the sermon is nearly done, then the minister says, 'And, secondly.' That's very dreadful, Gerty! It means that he has a great deal more to say. But I'm going to try and bear it all without fidgeting. And on Sunday afternoons—on Sunday afternoons, oh! then, Gerty, I'll learn the Shorter Catechism!"

Gerty laughed; for the portion of the Assembly's Cate-

chism, which Miss Martyn required her pupils to repeat on Sundays, was a bitter task to Ada. Gerty, who had been familiar with it for years, as most Scotch children are, had little trouble in preparing it; but Ada, who had spent her early childhood, first in Italy, then in England, had only been introduced to the Shorter Catechism when she came to Miss Martyn's school. Her Sunday lessons were in consequence very difficult for her, and brought her almost invariably into disgrace.

"You must work very hard to-day, then, Ada," said Gerty; "for we have the Fourth Commandment, and the requirings and forbiddings, in the questions we have to learn for this evening. And the reasons annexed, too—*they* are about the worst, I think."

"But I'm not going to begin to-day, Gerty," said Ada hastily. "To-day I'm going to enjoy myself. To-morrow I'm going to be good."

"Oh! well, then," said Gerty, considerably relieved.

The idea of her merry little playmate becoming like Emily Gordon was not a pleasant one to her; and she and Ada both firmly believed that it was Emily's being "good" that made her melancholy and uninteresting. Though Gerty did not like to say so, she hoped and expected that Ada would forget her good resolutions for the next day. But in this she was mistaken.

On Monday morning Ada rose so early that she had put her desk tidy, and was seated in the schoolroom learning her lessons, before the other girls had left their beds. The curious gravity of her countenance during the morning amused her companions, but she was quite willing to give an explanation of her changed behaviour,—

"I'm going to be good, really and truly; so you mustn't make me laugh."

“Is that *Ada* practising in the Blue Room?” asked Kate M’Kenzie, in the forenoon. “What can have come over the child? She has played nothing but scales for the last half-hour; I’m perfectly sick of the sound!”

“Ada has reformed,” said one of the other girls. “She is quite a changed character; at least, so she has been telling every one this morning.”

Kate laughed, and said she hoped the reformation would last, but she had her doubts about it. Mary Carr bent over her German exercise, and did not say a word.

During the rest of the morning *Ada*’s conduct was most exemplary. Her English lessons had been carefully learned before breakfast, and, to her own delight and surprise, she found herself, for the first time, seated by Gerty in her class. Stranger still, she neither whispered nor giggled; and so kept her place till the end of the hour. Emily Gordon, from the kindest of motives, had asked to be allowed to walk with *Ada* when they went out in the forenoon. She made her petition to Mademoiselle with fear and trembling; but when it was granted, and she and *Ada* took their places in the ranks, she could not think of anything to say. But *Ada*’s lofty mood quite took her by surprise. While Emily, feeling awkward and shy, was racking her brains for some agreeable topic of conversation, *Ada* began to discourse on historical subjects with the utmost fluency and in her best French. Emily was very fond of history, and knew a great deal about it; but *Ada*’s sudden interest in Oliver Cromwell, and the original remarks she made about his conduct, fairly bewildered her. Nor was she much enlightened when *Ada* said, as they reached home again,—

“History is a very excellent thing for improving the mind. I think our minds ought to be very much improved, after so much of it!”

She spoke in a tone of elation ; but immediately afterwards she gave a little sigh, as if, after all, the improving conversation had been rather wearisome work.

Gerty was much impressed by the change in her friend, and thought over it gravely as she sat by the schoolroom table in the afternoon, waiting for Mademoiselle to begin the dictation class. But alas ! for Ada's good resolutions. Gerty's sober musings were interrupted by the entrance of Mademoiselle with a long bedroom-towel fastened to her sash at the back,—an appendage which gave a very curious effect to her trim little figure and dainty dress. Just behind her came Ada, dancing on tiptoe, her eyes shining with mischievous delight, and her forefinger uplifted in warning to the assembled girls. But there was a general shout of laughter, and the quick little Frenchwoman turning round, discovered at once the fault and the culprit.

"Twenty lines for Mademoiselle Ada !" said she, with prompt indignation.

"Merci, Mademoiselle !" was Ada's polite reply ; then suddenly stopping, she looked across the table at Gerty with a comical expression of dismay,—“O Gerty, I forgot ! Never mind, I'll try again to-morrow.”

Afterwards she seemed anxious to be riotous enough to make up for the restraint she had been exercising upon herself. Finally, Miss Maria, finding her dancing in the passage, dressed in the singing-master's hat and greatcoat, sent her off to bed at five o'clock. Gerty was very sad for her friend's sake all evening, and puzzled herself much, thinking how she could comfort her. But when bedtime came, and she went with Janie and Molly to their room, the sight that met her eyes was certainly a curious one.

Two beds were drawn together in the middle of the room, and a red shawl spread over them. Up above was

a canopy made of the brightest shawls and cloaks which the wardrobe could produce. And in this tent (for such it apparently was) sat Ada, Turkish-fashion. It was difficult to say what national costume she intended to imitate, for she wore a crimson silk petticoat and a yellow turban; a sheet was gracefully draped over her shoulders; and she had plaited her hair into a magnificent pigtail, and made herself a moustache and beard with burnt stick.

But Ada's tableau did not excite the admiration she had probably expected. "You horrid girl!" said Janie, rushing up to her, "how dare you take my best petticoat? And my Indian handkerchief too! I declare I have a good mind to bring in Miss Maria, and see what she thinks of all this!"

"You don't seem to be aware," said Ada, in a tone of stately displeasure, "that I am the Grand Turk—oh no! I mean the Doge of Venice. His Royal Highness the Doge of Venice is not accustomed to be addressed in that familiar manner."

"O Ada! put away those things," said Gerty in great alarm. "Miss Maria may come in, and if she sees them she'll be furious. Quick, quick! I'll help you to put them away."

Gerty was far more anxious about Ada's safety than if it had been her own.

"Take off my things, I say. And if anything has happened to them you'll suffer for it," said Janie, red with passion.

Ada protested that never had Doge of Venice been so ill-used before; but, nevertheless, she made no real objection to Gerty pulling down her tent, and even helped her to hustle the things out of sight, and push the beds back to their places. Janie was still scolding, when Miss Maria,

who knew by experience that sending Ada to bed was not necessarily keeping her out of mischief, looked in to see if all was right. But the room was in pretty good order now, and the Doge was under the bed-clothes, blackened face and all. Miss Maria thought that Gerty's anxious expression, and Molly's half-suppressed giggles, were rather suspicious; but then they might be accounted for by Janie Leslie's evident ill-humour. So she went away without asking any questions.

"Didn't I make a nice tent, Gerty?" asked Ada, when they were all safe in bed. "It gave me ever so much trouble to put up; only I wanted to have some fun to-day, because I had spoilt it already, and I must be good again to-morrow. I wish I hadn't given Mademoiselle that tail, after I had begun so well in the morning. But she *did* look so funny!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWO FRIENDS LOOKING DIFFERENT WAYS.



AND now the summer days were passing rapidly, and the long, delightful holidays were not far distant. Gerty taxed her powers to the utmost, calculating first the days, then the hours she had still to spend at school. Not satisfied with that, she counted how many music-lessons were still to be gone through, how many meals she would take in Miss Martyn's house, how many times she would bid Miss Maria good-night. She had to call Ada to her help, and she turned out to be much quicker at mental arithmetic than Gerty, and quite as eager over it. For Ada was going away too. She was to spend her holidays with a young aunt, her father's only sister, who was married, and lived in London.

"I do love Aunt Laura so ! Only think of the joy of spending two months with her !" said Ada in delight, when she came to tell Gerty the good news.

"I'm so glad, Ada," said Gerty warmly. "I was afraid I was selfish with all my counting and wishing to get home, when I thought you had to stay here all alone. But now, of course, you will want to count for your own sake."

But except when absorbed in these delightful calculations, the little friends were never so far apart in all their school-life. It was not that they loved each other less, but somehow they had few confidential talks during these bright

summer weeks. Though they were all day in the same schoolroom, though they joined hands in their long country walks, and sat together on the grass in the gardens, each had separate interests which the other did not share. Gerty's whole soul was in her lessons just then; her greatest ambition in life was to win the English prize. That such a thing was possible, did not occur to her till nearly the end of the session. She stood high in all her classes, but so very high in English that she began to hope that, in spite of all her disadvantages, she might be first after all. Her most dangerous rival was a girl called Ellen Murray, and the question was, Could Gerty, who had only come at Easter, gain as many good marks in three months as Ellen Murray had done in six? For, unfortunately for Gerty, the marking for the prize had begun after the Christmas holidays. But she was not to be discouraged. She rose early in the morning; she studied in her play-hours; and if the rules of the school had allowed it, she would have deprived herself of air and exercise for the sake of that longed-for prize.

Gerty remembered afterwards with shame the bitter hatred she felt for Ellen Murray, and her passionate desire to triumph over her. The whole class was divided into two parties; and Gerty's adherents told her that if Mr. Sherwood acted fairly, he would break the customary rule for this once, and count the marks for the last quarter only. And Gerty knew that if that were the case the prize would be hers. And even if it were not, there was still a chance that she might win, in spite of her enemy's advantage in being first in the field; then that would be double glory!

Gerty used to take her books with her when she went to her bedroom at night, and sit poring over them as long as she could see to read. One evening she was busy with her

geography—counting a list of names on her fingers, and muttering them to herself under her breath. There were to be written examinations on all the work that had been gone over since Christmas, and Gerty was bravely getting up the history and geography that her companions had learned during the quarter before she had joined the class. She was quite enjoying the unwonted silence in the room; for Molly Smith was already asleep, and Janie Leslie was entirely occupied with a new pair of light kid gloves, which she was trying on for the first time. Ada was lying on the top of her bed, and had said nothing for a long while; but Gerty saw nothing remarkable in that, for they had all taken a long walk that evening, and Ada was always tired after a long walk. Whenever Gerty looked up from her book to try to repeat the chief European towns and their population, she always saw the little white figure lying in the same position. It had been a lovely day, and now, though the sun had gone down, the clouds piled up in the west were shining with gold. And Ada, her face turned to the window, and one little hand under her cheek, was gazing up at the sky.

“I suppose they are all in heaven,” said she at last.

Ada did not even turn her head, but her unexpected remark made the others start. The geography fell from Gerty’s hand; and Janie Leslie actually paused in the very act of dexterously introducing her thumb into a glove that was unwilling to stretch.

“Good gracious, Ada! what are you talking about? I thought you were asleep,” said Janie.

“I’m speaking about what we were reading in the Bible to-night. Gerty knows what I mean.”

But Gerty did not know in the least. Her mind had been so occupied with her geography all evening, that she

had scarcely been conscious of what she read at the time, and now all remembrance of it was gone.

"What was it, Ada? I forget just now."

"About the children that people brought to Jesus, and he took them in his arms and blessed them—don't you remember, Gerty? I suppose afterwards they were quite good, and they went to heaven when they died."

"Oh yes! I think so. Of course they went to heaven, I suppose. I never thought about it. But I don't think they died immediately; I think they grew up."

"But after they came to Jesus they were good, weren't they? They were good boys and girls, and then good men and women, and then good old people. And then they died, and went to heaven. Perhaps Maud knows some of them. Were all the other people that came to Jesus good afterwards, Gerty?"

"I suppose they were," said Gerty, rather slowly.

"Did Jesus show them how to be good, then?"

"Yes, I should think so."

"Oh! I *wish* I had lived when Jesus was on earth! Then I would have gone to him, and asked the way to be good."

"Ada, I wish you wouldn't talk of these things. You're the most profane girl I ever saw," said Janie virtuously.

"But, Janie, if you knew—if you *only* knew how much I want to be good. I've been trying ever so many days, and it's so hard I've never managed it. I suppose it's easy when one gets fairly into the way of it; but I've always got wrong somehow before one day was over."

"Well, I should think you have," said Janie. "You're not the sort of girl for a saint, Ada, and you needn't try it on. What have you been about to-day? Putting salt into Miss Framm's tea. I saw you very well, and everybody

know who did it. Miss Maria would have given you something sweet, if she had been at tea !”

“I am very sorry I did it,” said Ada, turning round, and speaking in her usual bright way. “It must have tasted so nasty ; and it was very kind of Fräulein not to tell. She *might* have done it, you know. But I wasn’t trying to be good to-day, because it was Mother Hubbard’s birthday. I got up very early, and took her pincushion to her room, and put it on her toilet-table, that she might get it when she got up. She was fast asleep, and she looked so funny in her nightcap ! But it was wrong to go to her room, for it’s against rules to go to any of their rooms ; so there was to-day spoilt at the very beginning ! Of course it was no use trying after that.”

“Did Mother Hubbard like her pincushion ?” asked Janie, who was anxious to turn away the conversation from its original subject.

“Like it ! Of course she liked it ; it’s a beautiful pincushion. I told her I had got up very early, when no one was awake but Gerty, and taken it up to her room ; and she said, ‘O my dear ! You shouldn’t have told me that, my dear. It was very wrong ; Miss Maria would be angry if she knew.’ But it *was* wrong,” persisted Ada, as the others laughed at her successful imitation of Mrs. Martyn’s manner. “I’m not going to do it again. To-morrow I’ll begin to be good ; then I’ll have a week before the holidays, for I want to get into a good state before I leave school.”

“I really don’t know whether you or Gerty is the greatest fool,” said Janie peevishly. “There’s Gerty worrying constantly over her lessons ; and you’re as bad about being good. It’s very disagreeable for me to be in the room with you two ; I do wish you would try to make yourselves a little pleasant sometimes. You’re always in one extreme or the

other, Ada. For a while you were too wicked to be spoken to ; now you're too good. It's very dull for me."

"I didn't think you ever could be dull while you had a looking-glass to stare at yourself in," said Gerty, contemptuously.

"You're very impertinent, Gerty ! But I don't wonder *you* don't like to look in the glass ; *I* wouldn't, if I were like you !"

Gerty vouchsafed no reply, and there was silence for a minute ; then Janie went on,—

"But, Ada, you're very funny when you like, and it's too bad to bother us with your goodness, if you *will* be good. Wait till the holidays, and then, when you are in London, be good to your heart's content."

"But perhaps I may die before then."

Janie rose with an impatient exclamation, and pushed away her chair noisily. Then she began to undress as fast as possible, having evidently made up her mind that further talk was useless. And Gerty and Ada seemed to be of the same opinion.

Poor Gerty had a bitter disappointment next day. Mr. Sherwood announced, at the end of the hour, that he had counted up the marks for the English prize. Miss Stuart had done remarkably well ; she stood much higher than any other girl during the last quarter ; but it was unfortunately the rule of the school to count the marks from the end of the Christmas holidays. Therefore, he was sorry to say the prize could not be Miss Stuart's ; it belonged to Miss Ellen Murray. Gerty tried hard to be brave, but the room got dim around her ; and after the master had left she still sat in her place, feeling stunned, until she was roused by the clamorous exultation of Ellen Murray and party. The elder Miss Murray, who was one of the big

girls, had come to the class-room to ask after her sister's success.

"Well, Ellen, have you got it?"

"I've got it! I've got it! I've beaten Gerty Stuart, in spite of all her hard work. Oh! it's splendid!"

"I say, Miss Stuart, how do you feel now?" asked one of the day-scholars. "Didn't you think you would get it? Come, now, tell us really!"

"But I've got it! I've got it; I've got it!" said Ellen Murray, jumping about and clapping her hands.

"You've got the book—but I've got the honour. And I had much rather have that!" said Gerty, rising at last, and speaking hoarsely.

"I don't see your honour," said her rival.

"Then you're a fool."

"Come, come now, Gerty," said Maggie Murray; "don't talk that way. It does you no good to lose your temper."

"I don't wonder she loses her temper," put in one of Gerty's friends. "Mr. Sherwood ought to have given her the prize; there's no doubt about that. And he would have done it too, I'm sure, if Miss Maria had let him, for Gerty Stuart is a great favourite of his."

"It's well for her if she is," was Ellen Murray's spiteful retort. "She's a favourite of no one else's. Miss Maria hates her like poison."

"Who says Gerty is a favourite of no one but Mr. Sherwood?" said Ada defiantly. Then suddenly putting her arms round her friend's neck, and laying her cheek against hers, she turned upon the other girls. "She's a favourite of *mine*!"

Maggie Murray laughed.

"So you put yourself along with Miss Maria and Mr. Sherwood. Well, you're cool enough for anything, Puss!

Come away, Ellen; you've quarrelled long enough, and if you're going to begin with Ada you'll get the worst of it. You had better come along with me."

"But I'll beat her—next year," said Gerty savagely, when she and Ada were in their own room. "She shan't triumph over me then. I'll have all the prizes that can be got next year. I wish it were come!"

"What! you wish the holidays over!" said Ada in astonishment; "your picnic, and the strawberry-feast, and all the nice things you were telling me about!"

"Well, I don't know," said Gerty, feeling as if she cared for nothing then but the lost prize.

She was very gloomy for some days, though she angrily resented any expression of pity. It was not till the last day at school had really come that she brightened up again. It was impossible then to escape being infected by the general gaiety. Miss Framm and Mademoiselle were almost as joyful and excited as the girls, who danced, and sang, and chattered like mad creatures. There was no formal examination at Miss Martyn's school, but it was the custom for the parents and friends of the girls to come in the forenoon to see the distribution of prizes. But before one o'clock there was a long morning to be got through, and in spite of the general glee many of the girls thought it the longest day they had ever spent in their life. To be sure, there was the packing to be done; and it was delightful to see the great boxes standing in the usually tidy bedrooms, and the girls' belongings scattered about in all directions. Gerty, who had never packed a trunk in her life, was a good deal puzzled how to begin; but Ada had no hesitation, and earnestly recommended her plan to Gerty. As the principal thing in packing was to save room, it would be best, Ada urged, to put the things that could be crushed—such

as muslin dresses, for instance—at the very bottom of the box. Then the heavier things would be put on the top. She had actually begun to pack on this principle, when Mary Carr, who had some idea how things would go on, made her appearance on the scene. Both little girls had pulled all their things out of the drawers; and now Gerty was seated on a toilet-table, looking from her open box to the disordered heap of clothing on her bed, with a face of grave perplexity; while Ada, who had already packed a good many of her things entirely to her own satisfaction, was carefully stowing her travelling hat in a snug corner of her trunk. She was singing exultantly, “In London town there be kings and queens, a-sitting all in a row;” when Mary Carr’s exclamation of dismay made her stop to explain the advantages of her peculiar method of packing.

“But, my dear Pussy,” said Mary, when Ada had finished expounding her views, “your things would be all in a dreadful mess before you got to London, and then how would you be respectable to appear before the kings and queens? And don’t you think it would be slightly inconvenient to travel without hat or gloves? I’ll pack your things for you; and Gerty’s too, if she likes.”

Of course Gerty did like; and even Ada was content to give in, and sat watching Mary rapidly and dexterously folding up the ill-used garments, and laying them neatly in the box.

Gerty dressed herself early, and was among the first of the girls to enter the drawing-room. The folding-doors were open, and the table with the prizes stood full in view in the smaller room, where Gerty had first bid good-bye to her mother three months ago. Both drawing-rooms had flowers in them; the furniture was differently arranged, and everything had a festive appearance. Miss Maria was

sailing about, magnificent in a light silk; and the girls with their bright dresses and brighter faces were assembling fast in the larger drawing-room, leaving the private one for the Martyns and their visitors. Mary Carr was the last of them all. She had given herself a great deal of trouble, and considerably shortened her time for dressing, by her kindness to Gerty and Ada, but I don't think she regretted it for all that. She had spoilt her beautiful bouquet, too, to share it with Ada, who was dancing about like a fairy, the scarlet geraniums in her breast the only bit of colour in her white dress.

Mrs. Stuart was to come that forenoon, and Gerty had fondly hoped she would see her daughter come forward to receive a prize. All her bitter disappointment came back to her afresh as she saw the beautiful books, and she went and sat down in a corner, her face the only gloomy one in the room. She would not go up to examine the prizes, as the other girls did, for she could not bear to see the book that was to be Ellen Murray's. She would not join in the admiration and criticism the girls were bestowing on each other's dresses; even approving remarks about her own worked muslin and broad sash gave her no pleasure. She sat quiet and watched Mary Carr, wondering how she could look so much like her usual self. For Miss Carr was going to get a prize, as everybody knew—a beautiful book of Mendelssohn's *Lieder*, the only prize given by the music-master, and bestowed upon the very best pianiste in the school. When Gerty grew up to be a young lady, and wore cushions in her hair and long dresses, was it possible that she too might become indifferent to prizes? Well! it might be so, but she could scarcely believe it.

The visitors came at last, and the masters. Mrs. Stuart was late, and the prize-giving had begun when she entered

the back drawing-room, so she could only smile and nod to her little girl sitting among her companions.

The English prizes were given first. But to see Ellen Murray walk up with a triumphant face to receive her prize from Mr. Sherwood, to hear his complimentary words, and see her self-satisfied smirk, were more than Gerty could bear. She got behind Miss Carr and Miss M'Kenzie, who were standing together in front, and, concealed by their ample skirts, she stopped her ears with her fingers; and not content with that, shut her eyes tight. She had been blind and deaf for some minutes, and was beginning to think the dreadful event must be over now, when some one took hold of her hands and dragged them down by force. Gerty, opening her eyes in astonishment, found that the girls in front of her had moved to the side, and that she was full in view of Mr. Sherwood and the company in the back drawing-room. And Mr. Sherwood, with a gorgeous book in his hand, was standing by the table laughing: all the other masters were laughing, and so were the visitors; even Miss Maria had a smile on her face. And masters, visitors, governesses, and girls were all looking at poor Gerty, who got fiery red, though she did not know why.

"Little idiot, go and get your prize," said Mary Carr in a whisper.

Gerty made a few steps forward, and then stopped in the middle of the floor, looking extremely foolish.

"I really mean you, Miss Stuart," said Mr. Sherwood kindly. "If your ears had been open you would have heard me make a speech about you, and say it was only fair to give two prizes in your class. This is yours, my little girl, and most honourably have you won it."

Gerty walked slowly up to the table to receive her beautiful book. She took it very awkwardly; I doubt whether

she even thanked Mr. Sherwood; but her look of intense delight repaid the good-natured master, who had given another handsome prize rather than disappoint the child. Years afterwards, when the incident had been forgotten by everybody else, Gerty thought often of her first prize, and grieved that Mr. Sherwood never knew how grateful she was. But I think her grief was needless—he did know very well.

Of course Gerty should have returned to the other girls, but she was too bewildered to think of that. Hugging her treasure close, she turned round, and catching sight of her mother's face, she made a spring to her side,—“Mamma, it's—it's—perfectly beautiful!” said she quite audibly.

There was another laugh at Gerty's expense, and Miss Maria looked rather displeased at her breach of order, but apparently made up her mind it was better to let her remain where she was. And Gerty, her shyness returned, took refuge behind her mother's chair, with an uncomfortable idea that she had been making a fool of herself. But even that could not mar her pleasure much; she was almost perfectly happy. All her hard struggles were over now; her work had been crowned with success—the prize was hers; and this afternoon she was going home with her mother.

The girls pressed round her afterwards with congratulations, but could not resist teasing her a little about the curious way she had received her prize.

“I never saw anything so ridiculous in my life,” said Kate M'Kenzie, as the girls clustered in the passage before assembling at the strawberry-feast which was to be the end of the day's proceedings. “Mr. Sherwood called for Miss Stuart; and when we stood back to let her pass, there

was Gerty with her head down, as if she was going to butt some one, and her fingers stuffed into her ears as hard as possible. It needed all Mary Carr's strength to get them out."

Gerty was so happy that she bore their laughter very well, for the only shadow in the sunshine of that afternoon was the thought of the parting with Ada. *Her* joy over her friend's success was quite unmixed with any raillery, and was almost as great as Gerty's own. But when at last Mrs. Stuart was ready to go away, Ada was nowhere to be seen. After a long search, Gerty found her in one of the deserted classrooms, her head on the table, sobbing as Gerty had never seen her sob since the night they two had opened Emily Gordon's desk. She did not even look up, when Gerty came and put her arms round her.

"What's the matter, my own darling Ada?"

"The holidays have come," said Ada, through her tears—"and school is over—and I'm not good—I can't be—I shall never go to heaven—never, never!"

Gerty had no comfort to give. She could only lay her cheek caressingly against Ada's hair, and pat her shoulder gently: For several minutes neither spoke, and no sound was heard in the room but Ada's sobs. At last Gerty heard her name called through the house; the cab was at the door, and she must go.

"Ada, Ada! won't you look up and say good-bye?"

The little girls rose, and put their arms round each other, Gerty's tears falling in sympathy with the distress of her friend. Then there was a hurried good-bye, and Gerty had to rush off, having left herself no time to take a polite leave of Mrs. Martyn and her daughters.


Mrs. Stuart thought her little girl unnaturally grave during their journey home, and decided she had over-

worked herself; but Gerty was making up her mind to a great sacrifice. If Ada were to grow gloomy and silent, and give up playing, most of the brightness of Gerty's school-life would be gone; but then it was plain that Ada would not be satisfied otherwise. And Gerty would rather have Ada happy than herself. When she reached Burnside, and her brothers' boisterous welcome was over, she went upstairs to her own little room and locked the door. Then she knelt down by the bed, and prayed with clasped hands: "O God! make Ada a Christian, because she wants it so much. For Christ's sake. Amen."

It was a very short prayer, but perhaps it was the first real one Gerty had ever offered.

CHAPTER IX.

ONE ALONE ON THE HEAVENWARD ROAD.

HE leaves had taken their autumn colours of brown and red, and the air was keen with October frost, when Gerty went back to school. The tall house in the terrace looked so familiar, so unchanged, that Gerty could scarcely believe it was two months since she had seen it last. It seemed as if she had never left it at all, and her long, happy holidays lay far behind her like a dream, when the cab stopped at Miss Martyn's door.

But Gerty's feelings of melancholy were dispelled by the sight of a little figure that came running out on the steps to welcome her. Ada meant all that was pleasant in Gerty's school-life ; everything else was gray, and dull, and unhomelike ; Ada was the only thing she was glad to see unchanged. Gerty looked at her eagerly before they kissed, and was relieved to find she had not grown at all like Emily Gordon or any other melancholy person. She looked rather taller, to be sure, and she had changed her summer prints for a dress of soft gray ; but in everything else she seemed exactly the same Ada that she had been before. Gerty's prayer was not answered, then. Well, on the whole, she was glad ; and there was no use of making it any more, for Ada was evidently happy.

With a sense of entire satisfaction, Gerty took Ada's hand, and they entered the house together. Miss Maria

was waiting for them in the hall, and even before she greeted Gerty reproved Ada sharply for running out of the door, but she was too much occupied just then to give a long lecture on the subject. When Gerty went to pay her respects to Mrs. Martyn, Ada still accompanied her, and the two little girls kept up a sort of disjointed chatter on the stairs and in the passages; but it was not till they were alone in their own room that their tongues were fairly unloosed. And then how they *did* talk!

Ada's holiday experiences had perhaps been the most remarkable; for she had not only seen all the wonders of London, but had spent several weeks by the sea on the Cornish coast. And she had stories innumerable about her pretty Aunt Laura, and the grave husband and huge baby that belonged to her, and who both seemed to afford Ada great wonder and amusement. Ada talked most, as she generally did; but Gerty also had much to say. At Burnside there had been delightful walks and drives, glorious games of hide-and-seek in the garden, and a swing put up between two trees. There had been a pony, too, which Gerty and Fred had been allowed to ride; and twice it ran away with Gerty, and once very nearly threw her off; so that her mamma was nervous, and did not like her to go out alone. Also, baby could walk, and was able to say a great many words, and was altogether a most interesting child. And Gerty's cat had got three kittens.

The two little girls, perched on the top of the chest of drawers (for they never sat on chairs if they could possibly help it), were busily engaged in discussing suitable names for the kittens, when the door was opened violently, and Mary Carr entered and flung the little travelling-bag she carried in her hand impatiently on one of the beds.

"Does Miss Maria think I come here to be made a nurserymaid off?" said she.

She was not speaking to Gerty and Ada, but to Kate M'Kenzie, who had followed her into the room.

"It's very vexatious, Mary, but I suppose it must be borne. What can't be cured must be endured, you know."

"Don't exasperate me with your abominable proverbs and wretched truisms. Isn't it very hard that you and I, after being in the same room for three years and a half, should be separated now? I declare, if I had had any idea of this I wouldn't have come back to school!"

Mary seated herself on the bed beside her bag, and crossed her hands in her lap, with a comical expression of disgust on her face. She was both angry and annoyed, yet she could not help being amused at herself and her situation; and big girl as she was, she looked to the astonished children as if she did not know whether to laugh or cry.

Ada had slipped down from her seat, and approached her softly on tiptoe.

"O Miss Carr! are you really going to sleep in this room with Gerty and me?"

It was impossible to look at her face of eager delight, and not be somewhat mollified.

"Yes, Puss. Are you sorry or glad?"

"Oh! very, very glad for myself. But I ought to be sorry for you, oughtn't I?"

"Well, I don't mind so much for Gerty and you," said Miss Carr, conscious that she had been ungracious, and anxious to atone for it. "If you were to be here too, Kate, I wouldn't mind at all; but there's to be some little new girl—neither Janie nor Molly are to be here again. And I suppose I'm expected to act nurse and governess to the lot."

"Be thankful you have neither Janie nor Molly among your charges," said Miss M'Kenzie. "Look at the bright side of things, my dear."

Mary assured her friend that her love of sermonising was most offensive, and would become quite uncontrollable when she was no longer constantly beside her to check it. "If Miss Maria only knew your talents in that line, she would have put you here instead of me to lecture the children. But I suppose she means this for my 'opportunity.' I wish she had kept her disagreeable opportunities to herself."

Kate asked her what she meant, but Mary Carr did not answer; for she was thinking of her conversation with Miss Maria when Gerty and Ada were in disgrace, the particulars of which she had never confided to any one, not even to her bosom friend.

Gerty had thought it most prudent to sit still and take no part in the conversation; and now for the first time Kate M'Kenzie seemed to notice her, and shaking hands kindly, said she hoped she had enjoyed her holidays. But Mary paid no attention to her. She pulled off her hat and jacket in a sort of exasperated way; and when her box was brought up, she set most energetically to unpacking and putting away her things in the drawers.

Kate M'Kenzie stood and talked to her all the time, expressing sorrow at their separation, but counselling patience as the best thing under the circumstances. But Mary's indignation against Miss Maria was very hot, for it was quite a different thing to look after the children in a general way, as she had offered to do, and to leave her most intimate friend that she might sleep in the room with two little girls, and take a constant supervision over them. Perhaps it could not be wondered at that she abused Miss

Maria vigorously all the time she was unpacking, though she was conscious she was making a bad beginning for her influence over Gerty and Ada. When her trunk was empty, she shut it with a bang, and turned round to the little girls, who had been standing silently watching her.

“Are your things unpacked? No—of course not; I might have known that. Unlock your boxes, then, if you haven’t lost your keys, as I suppose you have. What must be, must be, so I’ll help you to unpack. If I *am* to work, I’ll do it for you two; as for the other little wretch that’s coming, she can look after herself. I’m not going to be bothered with her.”

Gerty protested that Miss Carr need not trouble herself with *her* things; but the young lady would take no denial, and at last made the somewhat surprising declaration, that if she had not wished to help them she would not have offered to do so! And Miss M’Kenzie came forward to take her share in the work, with a remark about the advantages of division of labour; so for once Gerty and Ada had their things tidily arranged in their drawers.

“Well, Mary, I suppose it’s all for the best,” said Kate M’Kenzie, speaking half in jest half in earnest to her friend as they went down to tea. And there came a time when Mary Carr echoed her friend’s words, but that was not till long after.

Other girls came in the evening; among them Emily Gordon, already wrapped in her winter furs, and looking as pale and delicate as if she had been studying hard during the last two months, instead of spending her holidays in the free air of the Perthshire Highlands. The Murray sisters arrived too; and Janie Leslie came from her home in Glasgow, radiant in a set of bright blue ribbons and feathers to match. Ada was in a state of excitement all

evening, and ran to the lobby to greet every new-comer with a welcome back to school, and inquiries how she had enjoyed the holidays; until at last Miss Maria came with orders to remain in the schoolroom and keep the door shut. To be running about in the passages when it was not strictly necessary, was, according to Miss Maria, "not at all *comme il faut*." But Gerty noticed it as being odd that Ada obeyed her implicitly, and would not be persuaded to leave the room again, even when she knew, and every one else knew, that Miss Maria was out of hearing in the private drawing-room at the other end of the house. In vain Ellen Murray proposed a stroll in the dark rooms,—a favourite pastime with Miss Martyn's girls; Ada would not hear of it, and only gave vent to her restless mood by racing up and down the schoolroom. It was so unlike Ada to give up anything of that sort she wanted to do, because it was forbidden, that Gerty was puzzled and uneasy about her, and determined to ask an explanation as soon as they were alone.

The bedroom where Gerty and Ada slept looked wonderfully snug that night; for, early as it was in the season, the weather was already cold, and a bright fire was roaring and crackling in the grate. Bedroom fires were not the general rule at Miss Martyn's; but kind Mother Hubbard was ever afraid lest Ada, who had been born in a warm climate, should suffer from the rigour of the northern winters. There was something very delightful to the little girls in sitting down on the rug in the warm firelight, with the room all to themselves; for the new inmate had not yet arrived, and Mary Carr had gone to her old quarters to pay a visit to Kate M'Kenzie.

Ada had put out the gas; but the fire was bright enough to light all the room behind, with its white beds and

curtained windows, as well as the two little figures sitting together in front. They were a curious contrast, the two children: Ada, delicate and liquid-eyed, with a foreign grace of figure and motion which she had inherited from her Italian mother; and Gerty, the very type of a sturdy, well-made Scotch girl, her short brown hair brushed straight back from her healthy face, which was lighted up by a pair of gray, intelligent eyes.

It was the very time to finish the confidential conversation that had been interrupted in the forenoon, but it was not of holiday pleasures or holiday adventures Gerty spoke first.

"Have you given up trying to be good, Ada, or are you still going on?"

The answer came immediately,—“I am still trying; and some day I shall be quite good!”

There was a glad ring of certainty in Ada's voice that made Gerty wonder; and she paused a little before she asked again, “And when will that be?”

“When I see Jesus,” said Ada.

The answer was so unexpected by Gerty, who thought Ada meant that she was going to put off her efforts to some future time—perhaps till after the Christmas holidays—that she was quite taken aback, and found nothing to say.

“I was very miserable after I went away,” Ada went on, “for I couldn't be good; and I thought I would never go to heaven, and see my little sister and the beautiful angels. And one day, when I was at the sea-side walking with nurse and baby, they sat down among the rocks, and I went on, and on, and on. In the morning I had been reading about people coming to Jesus at the sea-side—ever so many of them. And the tide was going out, and there were boats up on the shore. Oh! I wished so much I could

have seen the Lord in one of the boats, or walking about on the sands, as they used to see him long ago. I thought I would have told him that I had tried hard to be good, and I couldn't possibly; and then perhaps he would have said, 'Your sins are forgiven, Ada; I will help you to be good.' And I wished it so much. But it was so stupid of me not to see how it was, for all the time the Lord Jesus was quite near, and I was keeping him waiting! And at last it came into my mind all at once, that though I couldn't see him, that didn't matter much, for he could see me just as well. So I knelt down on the rocks where no one else could see, and I told the Lord Jesus everything. I told him that I was always doing wrong things, and Miss Maria said I was a disgrace to the school, and that I had opened Emily Gordon's desk to get her diary; and I asked him to forgive me, and take me to belong to his own self. And I *know* he said 'Yes,' though I couldn't hear him."

"Then do you think you are a Christian?" said Gerty.

"Yes," said Ada, without the least hesitation. "The Bible says Jesus never sends any one away when they come—never casts them out, I think the verse says."

"And does it make you happy?"


"Oh yes! Won't you come too, Gerty? I would like you to, so much; and I know the Lord Jesus wants you."

Ada's hair was on Gerty's shoulder, and she felt her breath on her cheek; but to Gerty it seemed as if a great wall of separation had risen up between them. She sat looking into the fire, and did not answer her friend a word. Mary Carr came back presently; and Gerty, saying she was tired, went to bed immediately, and lay down with her face to the wall. But she did not sleep for a long time. Familiar as she was with the Bible, texts of Scripture were not often in her mind: why was it that to-night one verse

came back and back again. She did not remember having read it lately ; she could not even have found the place where it was : "And the first shall be last." Well, Ada had got her wish, but it was not Gerty's wish ; she would rather it had not been Ada's wish either. Gerty had wished for the prize, and she had got it ; but she had never wished to be a Christian—at least not now. Some time, of course, she meant to be one—when she grew up, likely. Ada had got her wish, as Gerty had prayed that she might ; had Gerty any right to wonder or be sorry that they two were different now ? "And the first shall be last—the last shall be first." Then back again the old way, "The first shall be last." So it went on like a chime.

CHAPTER X.

THE OTHER STILL HOLDING BACK.

HE bedroom fire had long died out before Gerty fell asleep, and she slept on heavily far into the morning. When she at last opened her eyes, Ada, already dressed, was chattering about the Crystal Palace to Mary, who was coiling up her hair with rapid fingers, while she listened with amused attention to the little girl's story. It was quite time for Gerty to get up, and go through her toilet operations as fast as possible. She felt thoroughly cross and uncomfortable as she dressed quickly ; and when she caught sight of her own grave face in the glass, it occurred to her as strange that it was she, not Ada, who was looking gloomy and dejected. The other two tried to make her join in their conversation ; but when she remained persistently silent and uninterested, they came to the conclusion she was suffering from home-sickness, and that it would be kindest to let her alone.

The school had not settled down into working order yet ; the girls had not all assembled, and only a few of the masters attended that day ; so as there was little to be done in the way of lessons, the younger girls were told to get ready early to go out for a walk. They were all dressed, and waiting in the schoolroom for Mademoiselle, when Mrs. Martyn appeared, leading by the hand a little girl of eight or nine years old, who was dressed, from her

feathered hat to her high-heeled boots, in the very extreme of fashion.

"This is little Miss Allardyce, my dears, just come in time to go out a walk with you. Ada and Gerty, she is to sleep in your room, and I hope you'll be very kind to her."

Mrs. Martyn went away, leaving the little girls alone to make acquaintance with their new companion; and as little girls generally do in such circumstances, they stared at her for some time, and said nothing. She was rather a pretty child, with one of those pink and white complexions that remind one irresistibly of a wax doll; and the resemblance was heightened by her large, light-blue eyes, and a profusion of flaxen hair, which was crimped in the most elaborate manner. She did not seem in the least embarrassed by her new position, but returned her school-fellows' stare very coolly, then took a survey of the room. Her eyes wandered with evident disgust from the map-hung walls and curtainless windows to the desks round the sides of the schoolroom, and the long table in the middle. Finally, she examined a chair that was standing beside her, certainly rather too straight-backed and hard to be very comfortable, and her face put on a most doleful expression as she turned again to her companions.

"Such a nasty room!" said she, screwing up her lips with a curious expression of peevish discontent.

"Have you very nice rooms at home?" said Ada. "Tell us where your home is, and what's your first name."

"My name is Miss May Allardyce, and my papa and my mamma live in Moray Place. What's yours?"

"My name is Miss Ada Godfrey, and my papa and my mamma live in the Punjab," said Ada, in exactly the same tone.

Miss May Allardyce seemed to meditate whether the Punjab might be an aristocratic locality or not ; but seeing the other girls laugh, she apparently came to the conclusion she was being hoaxed in some way.

"I don't believe it," she said, in a determined tone.

She was in no way abashed by the shout of laughter her remark was received with ; and when Mademoiselle appeared immediately afterwards, with her "*Allons, mes enfants,*" May was no more impressed by the governess than she had been by the pupils.

"Who is that funny little woman?" she asked aloud. "What is she here for? Why does she speak that way?"

Gerty made up her mind, as the day went on, that May Allardyce would be anything but an agreeable addition to their bedroom society ; even Janie Leslie she thought less objectionable. For May, who had been a spoilt child at home, was always accustomed to have her own way ; and now, on her first arrival at school, she contrived to make herself disagreeable both to teachers and pupils. Before the girls had walked far, she declared she was tired and wanted to go home ; and at last won the victory over Mademoiselle by beginning to weep and wail loudly. As it was a lovely day, the others were by no means willing to return, and the girls were as indignant at the troublesome little new-comer as the governess herself could be. And when at last May met her match, and was snubbed by Miss Maria as no new girl had ever been snubbed before, all her companions were ready to chuckle over her discomfiture. At dinner May was making grimaces over her food, and would have left the most of it on her plate, when Miss Maria coolly and quietly informed her, that if she did not eat what she asked for at dinner, it would reappear at tea, to be finished before she got anything else.

May's tears came immediately, but Miss Maria showed no signs of relenting ; so she thought it best to submit to her fate, and finish her dinner. In the schoolroom she whined over the easy lessons that were given her, and argued with Mademoiselle till that little lady's patience was quite exhausted, and she gave vent to her feelings in forcible French, which, though unintelligible to May, delighted the other girls extremely. But May, as a playmate, turned out to be the most disagreeable of all. And when she was at last turned out of her companions' games, because she persisted in playing unfairly in spite of warning and remonstrance, she first cried, and then drying her tears, she occupied herself in most successful attempts to spoil the fun for the others.

Mary Carr declared loudly that she would have nothing to do with such a peevish, disagreeable child ; and her feelings to May were not more affectionate after she heard the little girl's opinion of her room companions.

"Miss Maria says there is a nice girl to sleep in the room with me," said May, after they had retired for the night. "She said that to mamma, and I want to know which it is."

"Which do you think?" asked Gerty. But if she had hoped for a compliment she was entirely disappointed, for Miss May, looking round on the three, turned up her small nose, and observed, "I don't think any of you is nice girls!"

Miss Carr remarked that May was certainly a sweet little creature ; while Gerty felt very much irritated, though she tried to join in Ada's laughter. May went on presently,—

"Have you got to undress in the same room you go to bed in? That's very nasty. At home we've a day nursery, and a night nursery, and beds with curtains. I don't like

this at all. And Brown always undresses me. Oh ! I want Brown !”

“You must be your own nurse now,” said Mary firmly. She gave the child no assistance at all in undressing, saying it was well she should learn to be independent ; a remark which Gerty loudly applauded, forgetting how acceptable the elder girls’ help had been to herself and Ada only the day before. May managed at last to get off her clothes, and went into bed leaving them all on a heap on the floor. She had continued to complain fretfully all the time she was tugging at her strings and buttons, so that it was a great relief to her companions when she fell sound asleep as soon as her head touched the pillow.

When Gerty and Ada brought their Bibles and sat down on the rug to read, Mary Carr came and offered to join them. But though she was very attentive and very reverent as she read of the Saviour who went about continually doing good, it never once occurred to her that, in refusing her help to the child who needed it, she had missed an opportunity of imitating him. She was willing to take a great deal of trouble for the sake of Gerty and Ada, whom she liked, but she considered herself quite justified in neglecting the little stranger who was so spoilt and peevish. Before Gerty got into bed she went to look at May, and found her lying with her necklace still round her throat, and the ribbon that tied back her hair twisted hopelessly into the crisp waves that had been so carefully arranged in the morning. But Gerty only congratulated herself and her friends on the apparent soundness of May’s slumbers, and went contentedly to bed under the impression that, for that night at least, they would have no more trouble with her.

Gerty was dreaming a pleasant dream about being with

her brothers in the garden at Burnside, when there came a scream so loud and shrill that she wakened up immediately, cold with terror, and trembling from head to foot. But the shriek had been uttered by no ghostly voice audible to Gerty alone, for it gradually died away into low sobs and cries which were evidently coming from May's bed, and Miss Carr was sitting up asking in alarm what was the matter. May's reply, given in the midst of her wailing, could not be understood at first; and it was some time before Gerty found out that there was a beast—a horrible beast—in the room, and that it had taken hold of May's foot.

"She's a beast herself!" said Gerty indignantly, turning round in bed and drawing the clothes tight about her. It was not a nice thing for Gerty to say, but it must be remembered she had been wakened with a start from a very pleasant sleep; and sleep is precious to girls who have to rise at half-past six in the morning.

"You've been dreaming, child," said Mary contemptuously. "Go to sleep again; or at least be quiet, and let other people sleep." And she too lay down again. But May would not be comforted. "I can't lie down. It's there! I felt it at my foot. O dear! O dear! O dear!"

She fell a-crying with fresh vigour when she saw that no one intended to come to her assistance, and the others were fairly roused.

"Will you be quiet if I light the gas and show you there's no beast here?" said Mary at last. "Oh! thank you, Ada! you *are* a good child," she added, with some compunction in her tone, as Ada made a sudden jump over the end of her bed and put a match to the gas. The light revealed May sitting up on her pillow afraid to move, her

eyes round with fright, and her poor little face all red and swollen with crying.

"There is nothing here but Miss Carr and Gerty and me," said Ada; "don't you see, May? There is nothing else here at all."

May seemed to take courage, now she was no longer in the dark, for she stopped crying, and began slowly and cautiously slipping under the blankets again. But presently she uttered another yell even louder than the first; and this time she jumped fairly out of bed, screaming that the beast was there,—she had felt it sting her again. And when Ada pulled off all the blankets, she discovered a collection of holly branches; but as the stock had apparently been too small to satisfy the malice of those who had put it there, a large addition had been made in the way of brushes and combs, so that the whole of the bottom of May's bed was one mass of prickles. Poor child! she had curled herself up at first so that she had not touched it; but moving in her sleep, she had felt, as she thought, a huge monster of the hedgehog species lying at her feet. Gerty had been sitting up in her bed watching; and now Ada's revelations turned her ill-humour into merriment, and the two shouted with laughter till Mary actually began to fear that Miss Maria's august slumbers in the story above might be disturbed.

"Look, May!" said Ada, when she found voice at last, "it's only some holly and brushes the girls have put there to tease you. But I'm going to take your beast all away and put it in my locked-up drawer, where it will never get you any more. Some people will need to do without brushing their hair in the morning! And I think I know who; don't you, Gerty?"

Gerty too thought she recognized the brushes, and was

content that Ada should turn the tables on May's tormentors, by locking up their property safely in her private drawer. May had been sitting on the floor, staring in astonishment at the dismemberment of her beast, and it was not till Ada had swept everything out of sight that she found voice to say, "Oh! what *nasty* girls!" But she had not a word of gratitude for Ada; and when she went back to bed only complained that she was cold—she had not blankets enough. Now that the fun of the affair was past, sleep had overcome Gerty again, but she was dimly conscious of Ada making journey after journey to the wardrobe to bring garments to cover May; and she could hear her cheery voice asking many times, "Are you warm now?" before there came a sleepy grunt of assent. She thought afterwards that Ada at least must have been cold before she went back to bed, for when Gerty woke in the morning she saw May lying under a heap of shawls, jackets, water-proofs, and even dresses; the whole contents of the wardrobe seemed to have been pulled out for her benefit.

It was a great triumph to Gerty and Ada when Janie Leslie, Ellen Murray, and Molly Smith, were at last obliged to come humbly and beg the restoration of their property. They put it off as long as they could, and made various unsuccessful expeditions to search for their things in private; but Ada's little drawer, generally open and now so carefully locked, told its own tale. So after tea the whole three came to Ada, looking rather sheepish; and Ellen Murray began,—

"I say, Ada! give us our brushes, will you? I know you have them!"

Ada was seated on the schoolroom table when her petitioners appeared, and she surveyed them silently for a minute with dancing eyes.

“Promise, then, that you’ll play no more tricks on May Allardyce !”

Janie Leslie would have given in immediately, for she had a great horror of getting into trouble ; besides finding it very inconvenient to do without her brushes. The idea had been Ellen Murray’s, not hers ; and she would probably have refused to lend her things for the occasion, had not May made some unfavourable remarks about her personal appearance which Janie could neither forget nor forgive. But Ellen and Molly had already formed another plot to frighten May, by pouring water on her face while she was asleep ; so they both promptly and vehemently refused to give any promise not to torment her in future.

But Ada knew her advantage, and kept it. “As you please,” said she coolly. “Your things are not in my way—not in the very least ! I can take charge of them for altogether, if you like.”

“Give us back our things, Ada, *immediately* ; or we’ll go and tell Miss Maria you’re keeping them,” said Ellen in a bullying tone.

“Oh ! *please* do ! Then Miss Maria will ask where I got them.”


They tried coaxing after that, but all in vain ; and finally the whole three were obliged to give the required pledge—to the great amusement of the other girls, who were almost all collected in the large schoolroom for the evening romp.

From that time Ada constituted herself nurse and protector to May Allardyce. And Mary Carr stood aside and looked on with some shame and a good deal of wonder ; but May never asked her for help after the first night. It was Ada who managed her buttons, and combed her hair, and tucked her up in bed. It was Ada too who ordered her about, and scolded her when she got into mischief, in

an imperious way which was all her own, and which generally reduced May to obedience. And the other girls, seeing with what spirit Ada had taken up the defence of her charge, thought it wisest and best to let the child alone. They regarded the alliance between them as a capital joke, and nicknamed May “Ada’s baby,”—a name which stuck to her so well, that Ada was soon the only one in the school who called her May. It cannot be said that the spoilt child showed much gratitude to her friend; but she got into the habit of carrying all her difficulties and all her complaints to Ada, who would listen and pronounce judgment with amusing gravity.

CHAPTER XI.

HANDS CLASPED AND TOGETHER AGAIN.

ERTY was strangely restless and uncomfortable during these autumn days, after she first went back to school. Somehow her lessons seemed to have lost their charm; even the pleasure of doing better than Ellen Murray was not so keen, now that prizes lay in the far distance, nearly ten months before her. The evening games too were surely not so amusing as they had once been, though the other girls seemed to find them as pleasant as ever. And as for the needlework and improving reading that came afterwards, that hour was even more tiresome than it used to be. Gerty began to wonder if she too was changed as well as Ada.

For though Ada had not grown like Emily Gordon, she was certainly changed. It is true that Miss Maria still observed with displeasure that it seemed impossible for her to keep still,—that she preferred sitting on tables to sitting on chairs,—and that she went dancing about instead of walking in a sober and lady-like manner. And once, when she caught her sliding down the balusters, she not only gave her twenty lines to learn, but remarked grimly and sadly that it was a painful thing she was always the same. But the girls who were constantly with Ada, and especially Gerty, who watched her most closely, knew that there was a difference. It was not shown only in her kindness to

May Allardyce; for, indeed, Ada had always been generous and warm-hearted, and ready to take the weaker side. But now, though she was as merry a playmate as ever, Gerty and the others noticed that, after fighting hard to get her own wilful way in something, she would often, as if a thought had struck her, give in all at once—even sometimes when she was just winning the victory. And though she still made her companions laugh with her comic songs, she played them no more in her hours for practising. She took to singing hymns, too, though it must be confessed almost always those with lively tunes—"Mothers of Salem" being her special favourite. But the strangest thing of all was—she began to learn her lessons. She was not altogether successful in her attempts; for it was hard for her to keep quiet long enough to do her work tolerably well, and she was often overcome by the temptation to guess passages in her French translation instead of patiently seeking out the words in a dictionary, or to read the interesting stories in her history rather than study the part where her lesson was. Yet she did not give up trying; and though she never became Gerty's rival in her classes, it grew to be a very uncommon thing for her to sit lowest.

And Gerty, watching Ada, knew that she was trying to be good for Jesus' sake, and that some day she would be quite good, for then she would see Jesus.

In those days the two little friends were not so much together as they had once been, for Gerty rather avoided being alone with Ada. She was afraid she would come back again with that question she had left unanswered once; and yet as days went on, and Ada made no other appeal to her, she was sorry. Then when Ada found that Mary was willing to talk over their nightly reading, it was to her that she took her questions and difficulties, amusing

her sometimes with her curious remarks about the Bible characters, who were wonderfully real people to Ada. And Gerty would listen in silence, with her face turned away, feeling as if she were shut out.

Once in one of her miserable fits she wandered to her room after tea, and took up her Bible. She turned over the leaves listlessly to the beginning, where her name was written,—“Gertrude M. Stuart. With her mother’s love.” And underneath was the text Mrs. Stuart had chosen for her little daughter: Jer. iii. 4 (“My Father, thou art the guide of my youth”). Gerty had learned the words when she was at home; there was no use of looking up the place where they were; but now they came to her like a message from her mother, another voice even dearer than Ada’s, urging her to give herself to God. Great tears came into her eyes as she bent over the Bible and put her lips to the page. But just then Mary Carr and Kate M’Kenzie came hastily into the room, and Gerty’s only thought was a fear lest they should find out what she had been doing. She hastily covered her Bible with her apron, and began talking as fast as she could. But if she had only known it, the elder girls were far too much interested in Mary’s album, which they had come for, to take any notice of Gerty or her doings. They only thought her sudden outburst of talk was rather annoying, and were glad when she at last ran off to the schoolroom, having succeeded in putting her Bible away without being seen. But after that evening Gerty was more miserable than ever, for she felt as if she had turned away from her mother as she had done from Ada when she spoke to her in the firelight.

So the days and weeks passed on, and nothing eventful happened till one Saturday morning which was long remembered with delight by Miss Martyn’s pupils. The

girls had, most of them, collected in the large schoolroom just after breakfast, and were standing about in knots, enjoying the pleasure of doing nothing but talk. One or two very industrious ones had already taken their needle-work; and Gerty was in the midst of her weekly letter home,—a task which had always been disagreeable to her since she knew that it passed under Miss Maria's eyes first of all. Ada was busily engaged in placing a row of chairs on the floor with their backs upwards; taking a great deal of trouble in arranging them at equal distances from each other, doubtless for some purpose of her own as yet unexplained. But every one made a stop when the door opened and Miss Maria entered the room. It was not her custom to come to the schoolroom on Saturday mornings, when she generally left her pupils to their own devices; so her appearance was totally unexpected, and created a good deal of alarm. It was impossible to find out from Miss Maria's face whether she was angry or not, but the general opinion was that her unusual visit boded no good. As was natural, the first thing that caught her eye was Ada and her operations, and she asked immediately what she was doing.

"We're going to have a hurdle-race, and jump over these chairs, with little runs between," was the explanation she got.

"Certainly not! I positively forbid you risking your limbs by doing any such thing. Surely you can find some more lady-like and less dangerous game to play. If not, don't play at all."

Miss Maria had been startled into such unusual vehemence of manner that Ada was quite taken aback, and began picking up the chairs as fast as she could. But Miss Maria recovered herself in a moment, and speaking with her usual dignity to Janie Leslie, she desired her to fetch the girls

who were not in the room. It was quite evident there was a speech to be made, and the whole party were in a state of great excitement.

“Young ladies! my mother and sister think, as well as myself, that it would be advisable to alter, at least in part, one of the rules of the school—a rule which has, I believe, been very unpleasant to you. In future I shall *not* read and correct your home letters. You may close them yourselves, and they will be posted—unopened. Other letters, however, will be examined as before. And I rely on your honour, young ladies, that your letters to your parents will be as carefully written and composed, and as correctly spelled, as when they had to pass under my eyes.”

Such was Miss Maria's speech; and never was speech heard with more admiration and delight. Even Emily Gordon's face was shining. And when Miss Maria, having said her say, departed as suddenly as she had come, there was a great outburst of joy at the good news. Ada called for three cheers for Miss Maria, and would have led them off triumphantly, had not Mary Carr put her hand over her mouth. “Do you want twenty lines, you foolish, noisy cat?” The cheering was restrained, but there was plenty of noise in the schoolroom for some minutes, as the girls all talked at once, and as loud as they could. Most of them were inclined to think that Miss Maria had yielded unwillingly to the representations of others; Ellen Murray declared that the growing discontent of the girls had alarmed her; some thought that the remonstrances of parents might have had some effect; others were inclined to give the credit of the new arrangement to Mrs. Martyn. Mary Carr was at the head of a small minority who thought that gratitude was certainly due to Miss Maria herself.

“I think that Miss Maria saw that the rule was not

working well, and so she had the courage to give in that she was wrong, and change it. I always believed in Miss Maria, but now I believe in her more than ever!" Miss Carr delivered her opinion with such a firm conviction that her opinion was decisive that the girls were a good deal impressed, and most of them were quite inclined to think with her that if Miss Carr approved of Miss Maria, therefore Miss Maria had done well.

"I'll make her a pincushion for a Christmas present," said Ada.

Kate M'Kenzie laughed. "There is only one thing in the wide world Ada has been known to make, and that is—pincushions. And she doesn't make them either, for Mary makes them up for her, always. Do a pincushion for the bazaar, Pussy. That will be better."

"There are plenty of people to work for the bazaar without me," said Ada, making a face.

"I wish *I* could work for the bazaar," said Gerty regretfully. "I can make cardboard needlebooks; I'm sure they would be very nice things! But Miss Maria says I'm not to do anything else till I've finished that hideous kettle-quilt of mine."

"I don't wonder. You have been at that kettle-quilt ever since you came to school. We're all sick of the very sight of it; and so is Miss Maria, I should think. If I were you, Gerty, I would work at it to-day and get it done, for there surely isn't much to finish now."

"I'm sure *I'm* sick of the sight of it, whatever *you* are, Miss M'Kenzie! And I won't have time to finish it just now, for I'm going out to spend the day."

All the girls had turned to their letter-writing now, and were scribbling away with a rapidity that showed that Miss Maria's appeal to their honour had not made much impres-

sion. Gerty began anew with great spirit, and filled nearly six pages with anecdotes and remarks which would certainly not have been written in a letter which Miss Maria was to see. Then she made a pause, and sat thinking for a while before she wrote: "Mamma! I have been thinking a great deal about things lately. I read the text you wrote in my Bible over again. I wish I was a better girl, sometimes. Ada is now." She stopped again, and read it over; then her pride and reserve overcame her, and she crushed the letter into a ball and tossed it into the fire. She returned to the note she had cast aside, after Miss Maria's visit, as being too stiff and uninteresting, finished and folded it quickly, then fetched her despised kettle-quilt and sat down to work at the window.

But it seemed to Gerty as if the brightness of the morning had all gone; even the thought of writing letters which would only be read by the dear ones at home was scarcely a pleasure at all. And everything seemed bent on going wrong; for Gerty's wool got entangled, her needle dropped on the floor, and the piece of white canvas which still remained uncovered seemed to grow larger instead of smaller. She worked on for about half an hour, her ill-humour gathering silently; then her patience gave way all at once. "I won't put another stitch in that abominable piece of ugliness!" said she, suddenly flinging kettle-quilt, wool, and thimble to the utmost corner of the room.

Unfortunately for Gerty, girls at school have not often the opportunity of letting their fits of ill-humour wear off in solitude. When she ran off to her own room she found May there, waiting for her mother to take her out a drive; and Ada, who had probably come to look after her baby, was sitting on the floor reading a story-book. Gerty began to put on her walking things with a face so sulky, that it

would have deterred most people from speaking to her, but May began immediately,—

“How ugly you’re looking, Gerty! I hope you won’t look so ugly at my party. Do you know I’m going to have a party, and you’re all to be asked?”

“I’m sure I don’t care!”

“I am going to wear a pink silk at my party, with flounces. You haven’t got a pink silk dress, have you, Gerty?”

“No; and I don’t want one, that’s more.”

“Nurse says I look very pretty in my pink silk!”

“I’m sure you don’t.”

“But I do, you nasty girl! I do look very nice! You never saw me with my pink silk, so *you* don’t know!”

“You’d look exactly like a penny doll—that’s what you’d look like.”

Words were too weak to express May’s indignation now. She seized a book, and flung it at Gerty with all her might; then flew at her, to follow up the attack with tooth and nail. But quick as she was, Ada was quicker; and before the angry, weeping May had time to struggle against her fate, she found herself pushed into the large old-fashioned wardrobe, and the door shut upon her. Then Ada turned round upon Gerty, who was standing red and angry, the first volume of the “Fairchild Family” at her feet. May’s missile had hit her pretty sharply on the arm, and the pain had naturally not improved her temper.

“It was your blame, Gerty, quite as much as May’s! You were very wrong to tease her so.”

Ada’s tone was certainly imperious, and Gerty’s angel blazed forth immediately.

“You have no right to speak to me that way! How

dare you do it? Scold your baby, if she's fool enough to stand it from you; but not me, if you please."

Ada gazed in blank dismay at Gerty as she stammered out her passionate words, but she did not even try to answer her. And Gerty snatched up her muff and walked out of the room, slamming the door after her.

But when she was alone in the cab driving away from Miss Martyn's, a fit of remorse came over her, and she flung herself into a corner and began to cry and sob. "I've done it! I've done it now!" she kept repeating, thinking that Ada's friendship was lost for ever, and it was all her own fault.

The kind old maiden ladies who had invited Gerty to spend the afternoon, were distressed to see the child arrive with eyes all red and swollen with weeping. They began to fear that Mrs. Stuart's little girl was not well treated at school, and tried hard to give her at least one happy day; but they were sorely perplexed when all their efforts to amuse her seemed to fail, and she insisted on returning to Miss Martyn's very early in the evening.

It was not a long way from the Miss Campbells' house to the terrace where Miss Martyn lived, but it seemed endless to Gerty that night. And when at last the drive did come to an end—as all drives do, sooner or later—Gerty made an eager rush into the house and upstairs, straight to her own room.

"Where's everybody?" she asked, meeting Mary Carr at the door, and not liking to mention Ada, though it was her she wanted.

"Mademoiselle is reading an interesting story for once, and we're all in the drawing-room. I've just come for my scissors. You had better get your work and come along as fast as you can."

Mary hurried off; and Gerty, bitterly disappointed that she could not speak to Ada, had nothing for it but get her work-box and follow her to the drawing-room. The girls were sitting round the table, most of them busy at needle-work, for the prospect of the bazaar had made them unusually industrious. Ada was not working, but sitting leaning on the end of the sofa, her head pillowed on her arm, and her hair falling over her face so that it was impossible to see it. She did not move or look up, though she must have known when Gerty entered, for Mademoiselle stopped her reading to express her surprise that she had returned so soon. Gerty felt bitterly that Ada took no notice of her; it was evident, then, that she did not wish to "make friends" again. Trying hard to gulp down her tears, she bent low over her work-box that the others might not see her distress, and began pulling about the contents with trembling fingers. It was some time before it struck her as strange that her kettle-quilt should be there—the kettle-quilt she had thrown away in such disdain in the morning, vowing she would never touch it again.

Well, if Ada had given her up, the world would be dreary to Gerty henceforth—grounding one kettle-quilt more or less would make little difference. She might as well work as not; play would never be pleasant to her any more. So she took out the quilt, wondering a little who had rolled it up and put it away so neatly; but she stared in blank amazement when it was opened out at last. For the weary waste of canvas was all covered now; the work she had calculated would still take her several hours to do was finished, every stitch.

The reading went on till nine o'clock, but Gerty was not listening to the story which seemed so interesting to the

others. She sat very still, almost behind Mademoiselle, and never lifted her eyes from the kettle-quilt spread out on her lap,—to the great disappointment of May, who sat opposite, making faces at her which Gerty would not look up to see. But after prayers were over, Gerty was among the first to bid Miss Maria good-night; then she hurried out into the passage to wait for Ada. When she came out of the drawing-room, she made a spring to her, and without saying a word began to pull her in the opposite direction from their bedroom. Ada started and turned rather pale, for she was not sure of Gerty's intentions; but she made no resistance, not even when she found herself being led into the room where Gerty had once been confined. When the door was shut, Gerty for the first time let go her hold of Ada's arm, and the two little girls stood face to face in the dark.

"What made you do my work, when you hate working?" asked Gerty hoarsely.

"Because I'm very sorry, and I wanted to do something to make you believe it!" said Ada, with a piteous tremble in her voice; for she was afraid her attempt had been a failure, and Gerty was still angry.

"*You* sorry! *you* sorry! What have you to be sorry for? It's me that's a beast—a wretch—a—" But what else Gerty was going to call herself was never known, for she suddenly broke down and burst out crying. Ada had her arms round her neck immediately, and her cheek against hers, but Gerty disengaged herself. There was something she *must* say, and the time was short. Miss Carr or May Allardyce might come to look for them—perhaps even Miss Maria herself. So Gerty struggled hard to keep down her sobs and steady her voice.

"I have been thinking of things for a great many weeks,

Ada. But I've been very wicked and hard-hearted. I didn't want to think of them—but now—Ada!"—Gerty made a stop, and her weeping got the mastery again. "Ada! I want to be a Christian; only it seems too good and too happy that I should ever get to heaven!"

Ada put her hand into Gerty's, and clasped it as she had done the first evening they ever met.

"We will go to heaven together, Gerty! Jesus Christ will take us there!"

CHAPTER XII.

COMING CLOSE TO ANOTHER TRAVELLER.



It was Sunday forenoon, and a raw, cold day; the heavy gray clouds hanging overhead as if they were uncertain whether to descend in snow or rain. Gerty was sitting at the drawing-room window looking out on the deserted street, where there was not a person to be seen; for the church-bells had stopped ringing some time ago, and no one thought of going out for a walk in such dreary weather. Gerty had come down in the morning so pale and heavy-eyed that kind Mrs. Martyn was anxious; and when the little girl was obliged to confess to a headache, she told her that she must spend the day in the house. In vain Gerty protested that she was quite well; Mrs. Martyn was inflexible when she thought the girls' health was concerned, and Gerty could not explain that her last night's crying fit was the only reason why her head ached and her eyes were heavy. So it came to pass that, instead of joining the procession of girls in their Sunday dresses, Gerty sat at the window and watched them as they passed up the terrace on their way to church, walking two and two, with Miss Maria and Mrs. Martyn last of all.

Gerty was not left all alone, however, for it had been decided that the day was too cold for Ada to go out; a sentence which would have given her friend entire satisfac-

tion, if it had not been pronounced on Emily Gordon also. For Gerty was never at her ease when Emily was with her. It is true that she had made up her mind that Emily was an excellent girl, but she still disliked and despised her doleful ways; besides, her presence always brought back the sad and shameful recollection of her own fault, and its disgrace.

Emily was sitting now on a low arm-chair drawn in front of the fire, her hands listlessly crossed in her lap, and her eyes gazing into the fire with a patient, troubled look that irritated Gerty. So she had gone to sit at the window and look out on the dismal street, turning her head away from the cosy room and the bright fire. She had turned away from Ada too; for how could the little friends have any pleasant talk while Emily was in the room? Ada did not seem to wish to talk either, for she was lying on the rug intent on one of the Old Testament histories, and Gerty had been sitting solitary at the window for some time before she spoke at all. But, as usual, Ada was the first to break the silence, and this time by a most astonishing request.

“Will you tell me a story, please, Emily?”

When Gerty turned round in astonishment, she saw that Ada had put away her Bible, and was sitting on the floor at Emily's feet. But surely, if she had looked up in the face of the girl beside her, Ada would never have spoken to her then, for tears were rolling slowly down Emily's cheeks, and falling in great drops on her hands. She wiped them away hastily when Ada spoke, and looked down at her with a pitiful attempt at a smile.

“I'm afraid I don't know any stories that would interest you, Ada.”

“Oh yes; you do! Tell me about your home.”

"My home is in Perthshire, Ada—in a very beautiful part of the country."

"But tell me about it, and make it into a story."

Ada turned round to Emily now, and sat looking up at her in expectation. And, to Gerty's astonishment, Emily humoured her fancy, and, after a moment's pause, began in a voice as clear and steady as usual.

"If you were to come to see me at Laverock Hall, Ada, you would have to leave the train at a little country station, and drive nearly seven miles along roads where you would scarcely meet any one, through woods and moors almost all the way. And then you would come to a long avenue of beeches—great trees whose branches meet and make an arch overhead. So at last you would come to my home. I'm afraid you would think it rather an ugly house, for it's quite plain in front, with no turrets or odd-shaped windows; and the trees are so tall, and come so close, that it makes it rather dark. But when you came inside you would change your mind; for from the drawing-room window you would see that the house stands just above the river, which winds along for miles between the loveliest banks of trees. From mamma's room window, above the drawing-room, there is a better view of the hills far away, but I like nothing so well as the river and the woods. I don't know whether they are most beautiful in spring or in autumn, these banks of trees sloping down to the water; I wish I could describe them to you, Ada!"

"That's the way," said Ada approvingly. "It must be a very nice place. Tell me more."

"The front part of the house is new," said Emily, going on. "At least, it was built by papa's father; but the old house behind is scarcely habitable now. There is a secret chamber in it, Ada, where one of the Gordons, who had

fought at Culloden for Prince Charles Edward, was hidden for a month before he could escape to France. Soldiers came once to search the house, and they counted all the windows outside first to make sure of searching every room; but this little closet has no window at all, so they did not find it out. A press used to stand in front and hide the entrance, but it has been taken away long ago; and I would take you inside, Ada—that is to say, if you were not afraid of the damp, dark place, as my little sister Blanche is.”

“I shouldn’t be the least afraid. I should like to go in. But, Emily, have you got a little sister? How old is she; and what is she like?”

“I have got three sisters—Minnie, and Edith, and Blanche—all younger than I am.”

Gerty began to find this interesting; besides, it was rather cold at the window, so she too came and sat down on the rug at Emily’s feet. And Emily, looking with wistful eyes down into the fire, and never once turning to the listening children by her side, began to describe the inhabitants of the dear old house by the Perthshire river. She told of the gentle, delicate little girls, who played in the old-fashioned rooms, and hunted for wild flowers under the great beech-trees, till Gerty fancied she could see the little creatures with their pale faces and quaint dress—imagining them all copies of Emily in different sizes. Then there was the governess, Miss Butler, who was not at all like Miss Maria, Emily said, in answer to a question of Ada’s. She was rather old, and wore spectacles, but she was very kind and good in spite of that, and her pupils had loved her dearly for many years; for she had first come to Laverock Hall when Edith was a baby, and Emily only five years old. Miss Butler had never been known

to give a punishment lesson ; indeed, she gave very few lessons to learn at all, for Mrs. Gordon was very careful that her little daughters should not be overworked. Their hours in the schoolroom were very short, therefore, and the most of their time was spent out of doors, where they had little gardens to work in, and pets innumerable to take care of ; so that they never failed to have something pleasant to do, even after the daily walk with Miss Butler was over. These daily walks through the beautiful woods and wild moors round Laverock Hall were very different from the formal boarding-school walks which were so familiar to Emily and her listeners ; for the little Gordons were free to laugh and talk, and run about as they liked, and they did not turn and come straight home again after they had been out half an hour ; they had always some object for their walks,—generally to visit one of their Sunday scholars, or to take soup or jelly to some poor sick person.

Then Emily began to tell of the happy home-Sundays : of the drive along the quiet country-roads to the little solitary church, which stood on a moor, with no house near it but the manse ; of the afternoon school in the laundry at Laverock Hall, where Miss Butler, and Emily, and Minnie used to teach the little children of the neighbourhood ; of the meeting which Mr. Gordon held in a barn in the evening, for the nearest church was nearly four miles off, and many of the old people could not go there at all. She said something too of pleasant walks and talks with papa and mamma, and of the evening gatherings when the little ones were all allowed to take tea in the drawing-room ; but her voice began to falter, and she went back again to her Sunday school, evidently a subject of unfailing interest to Emily and her sisters. Gerty and Ada were much interested to hear of the Christmas-tree which they prepared

for their scholars every year, and hung with presents which the little Gordons had been working for months to make ready; but Emily's account of the summer fête held on Blanche's birthday was more amusing still, for then the children from several different schools were all assembled for a day of pleasure in the grounds of Laverock Hall. A great many swings were hung on the branches of the beech-trees for the occasion, and long tables were set on the grass in front of the house, where the children had tea early in the afternoon, and were served by the little Gordons with cake, and bread and jam, and such things as children love. When Emily had finished telling how at last the scholars were all packed safely into the carts that were to take them home, and went away tired and happy when the sun had gone down, Ada could restrain herself no longer.

"O Emily! I think you have made a beautiful story; and the best part of it is, it isn't in a book—it's all going on still. When you were at home in the holidays, did the school children come to spend Blanche's birthday and drink six cups of tea? Just fancy Minnie teaching her funny little girls this very afternoon! And in the evening, when we are saying the Catechism to Miss Maria, perhaps your papa will be walking through the woods to his meeting, with Edith on one side and Blanche on the other—exactly like what you were telling us about! Don't you think it's very likely he will, Emily?"

Emily was holding up one hand so that the little girls could not see her face, and she was so long of making any reply to Ada's eager speech, that Gerty began to fear she had said something to hurt her feelings.

"It's *not* all the same as it used to be, Ada," said she at last. "Minnie will have her class this afternoon, I dare say, just as usual; and Miss Butler will teach the big girls; but

—papa and mamma are not at Laverock Hall now.” She paused for a moment, and then went on speaking with an effort. “More than a year ago papa had a very serious illness, and the doctors said that he must go abroad for the winter—that going to a very warm climate was the only thing that would do him any good. So papa and mamma went to Egypt last autumn, and Minnie, and Edith, and Blanche were left at home with Miss Butler; but my aunt thought it was time I should have masters, so I was sent to school. We hoped papa would have been able to come home in summer, but he did not come; so I spent my holidays alone with Miss Butler and my little sisters at Laverock Hall, and so we had no tea-drinking for the school children this summer.”

The quiet sadness of Emily’s tone did not irritate Gerty now. She would have given almost anything to have brought some comfort to this girl whom she had once disliked and despised; but she could think of nothing to say to her,—there was a sort of awe mingled with her pity for this sorrow which was so much greater than any she had ever known. Ada rose, and kneeling at Emily’s knee, gently pulled down the hand that was hiding her face, and held it between her own.

“I am so sorry for you, Emily! I am so very, very sorry for you!” she said earnestly, with tears in her eyes.

“But your papa and mamma write to you sometimes, don’t they?” said Gerty, after a little.

“Yes; I had a letter the day before yesterday, and papa was a little stronger when mamma wrote. I am very silly, I suppose—but, do you know, when the bell rings very loud, or sometimes late at night, I am always afraid it may be a telegram for me—about papa. I know I ought to be submissive; but it is so hard, sometimes!”

Touched by the evident sympathy of the little girls beside her, Emily had told her troubles as she had never told them to any one before ; and now she did not begin to sob or cry, but sat quite still with her hand clasped in Ada's. She had been too long accustomed to suffer in silence for her grief to become violent now.

And Gerty, with her face turned away, was thinking with keen self-reproach that she and her companions had done their best to make Emily's burden heavier to bear. Was it wonderful that a girl watching and waiting for tidings of a sick, perhaps a dying father, did not care to join in the mirth of her schoolfellows? How could they expect her to look bright and happy like the others, when she was pining all day for the sweet Perthshire home, broken up perhaps for ever? Why had Gerty, in her prejudice against Emily, which seemed so foolish and unreasonable now, persistently misunderstood and misjudged her? Worse than that, she had chosen Emily out among all the girls in the school as the victim of an unkind and cowardly trick, which Gerty told herself *she* never could have forgiven if it had been played on her. And since then, when Emily had tried, by showing her little kindnesses in a timid way, to make her understand that she bore no grudge, and would fain make a friend of her, Gerty had turned away proudly and taken no notice. Had she really grown much more wicked since she came to school, Gerty wondered, going back to an old puzzle, or had she only been finding out of late what she really was?

It was well for Gerty that in those days she was beginning to look away from herself, with all her mistakes and faults, to One who died on the cross for our sins long ago. She was too shy, perhaps too proud, to ask Emily's pardon for all her unkindness to her; but she did what was better.

Sitting quiet on the floor, with her head on her hand, Gerty prayed earnestly in her heart to the Lord Jesus, asking him to forgive her, and help her for his own name's sake to show Emily, not by words, but by actions, that she was sorry for what she had done.

The three little girls had been silent for a few minutes, when Ada spoke again suddenly,—

“I’ve thought of something we can do to help you, Emily! Gerty and I will pray every night and every morning that God will make your father better—quite better, that he may come back to Scotland in spring. We’ll certainly do it,—we won’t forget!”

“I’ll *never* forget,” said Gerty, speaking very earnestly. “Emily, I can’t speak about things, but I *am* sorry for you.”

“You are very good,” said Emily gratefully. “I would like you to pray for papa. Pray that he may get better; and if not, that I may be able to say, Thy will be done.”

The last words were spoken so low that Gerty rather guessed than heard what they were; and there was a pause again, till Ada answered,—“Oh! but I think it’ll be God’s will to make your papa better. I’m almost sure he’ll make him quite well!”

Emily stooped down and kissed Ada and Gerty without speaking; then, as if the struggle to command herself could be kept up no longer, she went hurriedly out of the room and left the two little friends alone. Gerty and Ada had their talk now; but it was all about Emily Gordon and the sad breaking-up of her home-life; and then they wondered that they had never guessed something of her story before. They were still deep in the subject when a loud ring of the bell announced that the church-goers had returned; and Janie Leslie appeared in the drawing-room,

too anxious to hear the news to wait to take off her walking things.

"Dear me! you poor things, how did you get on all alone with that tiresome girl for hours?"

"She isn't tiresome. She's a very nice girl," said Gerty, with indignation that was perhaps rather too hot, considering how lately her own opinion of Emily Gordon had been the same as Janie's. "She's very nice, only she isn't happy;" and here she stopped, not knowing whether it would be well to tell Emily's story.

But Ada had no hesitation. "Do you know that her father is very ill, perhaps dying, Janie? And he was obliged to leave a most beautiful house in the country, and his three little girls there and Emily here at school, and go away to Egypt, or there was not the least chance of his getting better. That is a year ago now, and he has never been able to come home—not even in the summer-time, when the Sunday-school children have their party. And that is what makes Emily so very, very sad!"

Janie gave a short laugh. "Her being cross and sulky won't do her father any good, certainly. And you and Gerty are the strangest girls I ever saw. First you take up with that horrid little May Allardyce; and now it's Emily Gordon, though you two teased her worse than any of us before. I wouldn't have touched her things for anything; but you went and poked in her desk till I don't wonder you got into a row. But now you're going to take her part all of a sudden. Do you mean to take all the nasty girls in the school for your particular friends?"

"No, we don't," said Gerty very angrily. "We've not the slightest wish to take you for one of our particular friends!"


Janie did not see the point of Gerty's retort just at first,

but when she did she was furious, and it was well that Mademoiselle appeared on the scene and sent her off to her room immediately. Gerty was inclined to think Janie very heartless, and was sure that her indignation against her was righteous ; but after she was cooler, she began to fear that her anger had been excited, not so much by Janie's indifference to Emily's trouble, as by her taunting allusion to the opening of the desk, which was ever a sore subject with Gerty.

Nevertheless, it was a great satisfaction to Gerty and Ada that Mary Carr listened with attention to all they had to say about Emily, and seemed touched as well as interested. And when bed-time came, and the girls were bidding each other good-night in the drawing-room, Gerty put her arms round Emily's neck and kissed her, remembering an embrace she had refused her once. Gerty was not demonstrative, except perhaps to Ada, so it was rather an unusual thing for her to do ; but Emily looked so pleased, that Gerty felt she did not care very much though Janie Leslie and Ellen Murray were giggling at her. And when she knelt by her bed at night and prayed for her own father and mother and the dear little brothers at Burnside, she remembered Emily's father too, and prayed that God would make him well and bring him back to his children, if it were his will ; but if the Lord saw it was best to take Mr. Gordon to heaven, she asked him to comfort Emily.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STUMBLE THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN WORSE.

AY had talked much and long of the glories of the party she expected to have on her birthday, before it was announced officially by Mrs. Martyn that all the younger girls were invited to spend the next Friday evening at Mrs. Allardyce's house, and Miss Maria had graciously given them permission to go. Miss Leslie, Miss Gordon, Miss Ellen Murray, Miss Stuart, Miss Godfrey, and Miss Smith—they had all been asked by name; and the invitation had been accepted for them all except for Emily Gordon, whose parents, Mrs. Martyn somewhat unwisely told the girls, did not approve of children's parties. The delight and excitement with which the news was received was as great as May could possibly wish, and for the next few days the children talked of little else but the birthday-party.

Ada was perhaps the most joyful of them all, for as she had no friends in the city, she had little experience of the pleasures of visiting; and when her companions were asked out on Fridays and Saturdays, she always remained at school, sometimes almost alone. When the eventful day at last arrived she was wild with excitement, waking in the morning hours before it was light, and so restless all forenoon that she could attend to nothing. Lessons were not to be thought of, and she acquitted herself badly in all

her classes, to Gerty's great grief. Ada was apparently indifferent, however; and she was not the only one in the school who was unsettled by the prospect of May Allardyce's party.

Gerty and Ada were alone in their bedroom in the afternoon when Mary Carr came in, her hands full of evergreens. "See here!" she said; "I got my cousin to bring these from the country expressly for this wonderful party of May's. I didn't choose that my Pussy should go all colourless in one of her white frocks, so I'm going to dress her up like a Christmas fairy with ivy and holly-berries."

Mary looked so pleased and triumphant, that Ada was obliged to show some interest; but while the other girls had talked incessantly during the last few days about silks, and muslins, and sashes, Ada had given herself no thought whatever about her attire. And now it was Gerty who was most pleased with Mary's plan, and joined eagerly with her and Kate M'Kenzie in discussing the best mode of decorating Ada. "Give Gerty some of them," was the only suggestion Ada herself cared to make. But none of the others would hear of this; Gerty's blue trimmings and sash were all that her dress needed, and Ada was assured that red berries or green leaves would be anything but an improvement. The whole of the costume had been arranged before the bell rang for afternoon lessons, and Gerty was sure that the effect would be quite as pretty as uncommon, and that Ada would far outshine Janie Leslie, though that young person was to wear a new silk dress. Gerty would have struggled hard against a feeling of pleasure in mortifying another by being better dressed herself, but as she was always more unwilling to forgive an unkind act to Ada than if it had been done to herself, so now she thought there was nothing wrong in rejoicing over the

vexation Janie would be sure to feel when she saw Miss Carr's successful attempts to adorn Ada.

"I think this is the very longest day I ever knew," said Ada, as she and Gerty went back to the schoolroom; "I feel as if six o'clock would never come!"

It was certainly not a long day as far as light was concerned, for it was dull and foggy, and got dark so early that the gas was lighted and the shutters shut at Miss Martyn's soon after three o'clock.

Friday was one of the days when Gerty's class had a lesson from M. Bornand, and the hour spent with him was always looked forward to with a sort of awe. Of all the masters in the school he was the most feared; yet he contrived to make his lessons so interesting as well as dreadful, that not even Gerty's good-natured friend, Mr. Sherwood, was more popular. Gerty was always nervous about her preparation for M. Bornand; and when she came into the schoolroom from her practising at five o'clock, she was so anxious to get a last look at the fable of La Fontaine's she had to repeat that she forgot everything else, even the party. She brought her books, and sat down in her place without noticing that Ada was not in the room, until Mademoiselle interrupted her by asking where her friend was.

"Je ne sais pas," said Gerty, without looking up. But all the class was assembled, waiting for the master, and it was already several minutes past the hour, so Mademoiselle rose with an impatient exclamation to go and seek for the truant. She was only half-way across the room, however, when the door opened, and M. Bornand appeared—a tall black-bearded man, of a most majestic aspect. The girls all rose, as was the custom when a master entered, when suddenly the gas went out, leaving the room in darkness that was

almost total. A general commotion, and a stoppage of all the pianos in the house, showed that the same event had happened in the other rooms at the same time. M. Bornand, standing at the door, looked from the dark passage to the dark schoolroom, and muttered something between his teeth ; then strode across the room to the rug where Mademoiselle, with many expressions of surprise in her own language, was trying to poke the fire into a blaze. Gerty could not understand all they said to each other, but she made out that Mademoiselle feared there was no chance of the gas burning properly again, and thought it would be better to get in a lamp. The girls all sat and laughed ; then Gerty was startled to hear Ada's voice speaking out of the blackness close beside her.

"I'm very sorry, Mademoiselle, but I'm sure there's no lamp in the house. But we can get candles, and put them in black bottles! Six of them all in a row on the table would look very nice, and light up the room beautifully!"

"Taisez-vous," said Mademoiselle angrily.

M. Bornand had got a match lighted now, and the girls moved away from the table to let him put it to the gas. To the astonishment of every one, it lighted immediately, and seemed to burn as clear and steadily as ever. The light revealed Ada sitting opposite Gerty, in her usual place ; but, unlike the other girls, who were almost all in fits of laughter, she had an expression of wondering gravity on her face. "Très remarkable," she observed in a low, thoughtful tone, and then seemed absorbed in her books, which were all spread out before her.

Mademoiselle went back to her seat by the fire ; M. Bornand took his at the end of the table. A few sharp words from the master silenced the giggling of the girls,

and the class-work was gone through as usual. As for the gas, it never so much as flickered again all the time.

Mademoiselle was a shrewd little person, and very observant; therefore she had her own ideas about what had happened, and immediately after M. Bornand had left the room she came to the table and said,—

“Ada, you put out the gas. Is it not so?”

Ada turned round with a look of injured innocence, and opened her eyes very wide. “*Me*, Mademoiselle! *Me*! What makes you think that *I* put out the gas?”

“Were you not out of the room at the time, my child?” said Mademoiselle calmly.

“Yes, certainly; and so were a great many of the other girls. Emily Gordon was out of the room. Emily, did you turn off the gas?”

Emily was just entering the room when she met Ada's look of interest and this most unexpected question. Poor girl! she had been tormented all day because she was not going to the party, and now she was too low-spirited to see any fun in the situation which made all her companions, and even Mademoiselle, laugh. Gerty, in spite of her amusement, could not help being sorry for Emily, as she stood with burning blushes, stammering out a trembling denial of what no one dreamt of suspecting she had done.

“*Vous êtes très méchante!*” said Mademoiselle, shaking her head at Ada, and moving back again to the fireside, where the elder girls, coming from the different class-rooms, had gathered for a chat before tea. Mademoiselle had little doubt that Ada had turned off the gas, therefore she pursued her investigation no further, for she identified herself rather with the girls' interests than Miss Martyn's, and would fain have kept even this troublesome child out of a

difficulty if she could. But, as matters turned out, this was beyond her power.

The books were not yet all put away in the desks when Miss Maria entered, and walking up to the fire, turned round on the girls, though she addressed Mademoiselle. "Whoever has been so foolish and mischievous as to turn off the gas, must remain at home to-night and learn forty lines."

There was considerable astonishment; for some of the elder girls, who did not come into the room till after Mademoiselle's conversation with Ada, had not the least idea that the affair could have been anything but an accident.

"No one put out the gas, Miss Maria," said Mary Carr rather indignantly. And Mademoiselle began to explain in eloquent French that there must be water in the pipes,—that was certainly what was wrong. Such a thing had happened once in a house where she was visiting, only of course it was not so awkward there. But it was decidedly inconvenient too, for they were all in the middle of dinner; and it had turned out to be something about water in the pipes.

Gerty and Ada had been together at their desks when Miss Maria came in, and they both stood there still all the time Mademoiselle was speaking, and never once looked round. Gerty's heart was beating with terror lest Miss Maria should question each girl separately, as she sometimes did. But Miss Maria, though perhaps not quite satisfied, was considerably impressed, more perhaps by Mary Carr's emphatic denial than by Mademoiselle's story. She would have gone away again without another word, but Ada turned round suddenly, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes shining,—"*There may* have been something wrong in the pipes, but I certainly turned the screw!"

Miss Maria was quite aware when it was dignified to give a lecture, and she knew that this was not the time. So she merely said,—“I might have known there was only one in the school who would do such a thing. Well, Ada, you know what is before you. Mademoiselle will give you your forty lines to learn, and I will hear you say them at nine o'clock.”

Ada stood motionless for an instant, then fled swiftly out of the room and upstairs. In great distress Gerty followed her, but when she came to her bedroom it was empty. A fire was lighted for the little girls to dress by, and all their things had been laid out early in the afternoon that all might be ready. The pretty, snowy dress, with its sprays of ivy and holly, was on Ada's bed, and beside it the coral necklace and little white gloves, all arranged there by Mary Carr's careful fingers. Gerty put her head down on the pillow beside them, and began to cry. She would have gone to seek Ada, but she knew that if she wished to hide it would be almost impossible to find her; besides, what comfort had Gerty to give? Realizing fully the bitterness of Ada's disappointment, she felt that any attempts at consolation would seem only mockery to her just now.

The sound of the tea-bell roused Gerty, and brought her to a sudden resolution. If Ada did not go to the party, neither would Gerty; she would stay at home and share her loneliness, and help her to learn her task. Gerty bathed her eyes with cold water, making them thereby redder than ever; then she went to the dining-room in rather a defiant mood. The girls who were to spend the evening at school were all assembled round the table, and they stared in amazement when Gerty entered and sat down in her usual place. Mrs. Martyn looked appealingly

at Miss Maria ; for the kind old lady's heart was sore for Ada, and now it appeared that another was included in the same condemnation. But her daughter's gaze was fixed upon Gerty, and she asked coldly why she was there.

"I'm going to stay at home with Ada !" said Gerty bravely.

"Certainly not. Go and dress immediately."

Flushing with anger, Gerty rose from her chair, walked out of the room with all the dignity she could, and deliberately slammed the door after her. Then she made a stop in the lobby, thinking Miss Maria would likely call her back. She was not mistaken.

"Miss Stuart !"

Gerty reappeared, quite hoping she would be forbidden to go to the party.

"Shut the door quietly."

Disappointed and humiliated, Gerty was obliged to submit. No one—not even Ada in her wildest moods—had ever dared to disobey Miss Maria to her face.

Upstairs in the bedroom Gerty found Mary Carr, who was also going out to spend the evening. May Allardyce had gone home early in the afternoon, to the great relief of her companions.

"Where's Ada ?" was Mary's first question.

"I don't know."

"Is she at tea, do you think ?"

"No, she's not."

"Poor little thing !" said Mary compassionately. But having been solemnly warned by Kate M'Kenzie against showing too much sympathy to the children, she checked herself immediately, and said gravely,—“After all, I don't see how Miss Maria could have done anything else, for

putting out the gas was a most shocking piece of mischief. And Kate M'Kenzie says Ada deserves all she got, for she was humbugging Mademoiselle in the most impudent way before I came into the room."

"Miss M'Kenzie's very cruel. I'm sure *you* don't think so, Mary!"

"I ought to think so, I believe, Gerty. Her very confession was made impudently. Everybody, even Mademoiselle, thinks there was no need of telling on herself when she was never asked; and Kate says it was nothing but impertinence made her do it."

"Do you think Ada likes impertinence better than the party? She might have been impertinent to Miss Maria another time, if *that* was all she wanted!" said Gerty, in bitter indignation.

"Well, well, don't cry, Gerty. It was very brave of her to do it, if she thought it was right. Let me help you, for I think the others are all ready. Poor Ada! how pretty her dress looks! I can't bear to look at it now, though."

Gerty would fain have tried to get a word with Ada before she left, but the other girls were waiting for her impatiently, and she had to hurry off without even taking time to make herself tidy. Mary Carr had set her heart on her two charges doing her credit when they went to Mrs. Allardyce's; and now one could not go at all, and the other was obliged to depart with swollen eyes, rough hair, and her dress untidy. And so it was that poor Ada's foolish mischief brought trouble on others as well as herself; and May Allardyce's party, which had been looked forward to with such eager expectation, seemed scarcely a pleasure at all.

There was no reading aloud on Friday evening, so

after the little girls had been wrapped up in shawls and safely despatched to Mrs. Allardyce's, the elder ones who were left behind gathered in the schoolroom, which they could have all to themselves that night, undisturbed by the children's games. The long table there was so much more convenient for bazaar work than the drawing-room one; and to-night it was all littered over with work-boxes, paint-boxes, gum, cardboard, and wools; while it would have made the housemaid's heart ache to see how many scraps of paper and ends of worsted found their way to the floor beneath.

Most successful of all the workers was Mademoiselle, whose deft fingers could manufacture little boxes and baskets of wonderful neatness, and turn the most insignificant scraps of silk or cloth to account in making pincushions or pen-wipers, and such pretty trifles as would be sure to sell. Her aid was much valued by her pupils, who had been very careful lately to keep her in good-humour; for, easy-tempered and obliging as she generally was, Mademoiselle was apt to take occasional sulky fits, and it would never do, said the girls, to make her angry now the bazaar was coming on. There had been some fears lest the disturbance of the afternoon might have had the dreaded effect; and great was the relief when Mademoiselle appeared in the schoolroom, and sat down at the end of the table, with a request for bits of silk and ribbon to dress dolls. With the odds and ends she collected she was rapidly transforming the ugly little images she had brought into fairy-like creatures in all sorts of costume; while she was never too intent on her work to keep up a constant conversation, now in French, now in broken English, with the girls around her.

At a little table apart from the others, Kate M'Kenzie

was stooping over an elaborate wreath of delicately shaded flowers: for she had been determined that *her* work for the bazaar was to be a masterpiece; and though her companions were beginning to tease her now about the cushion that made so little progress in spite of all her efforts, she would in no wise admit that she had been mistaken in choosing it. None of the other girls were so ambitious. They contented themselves for the most part in making little articles which would be quickly finished and were likely to sell easily; and they were very merry as well as very busy over them. The only one who was not actually at work for the bazaar was Miss Framm; and even she had some wonderful German knitting half-finished for it, though it was not in her hands at present. She stood at the fire, reading and re-reading the crackling pages of a home-letter, whose tiny, neatly-formed characters looked curiously unintelligible to English eyes. When Miss Framm's weekly letters came, she always spent the most of the evening over them; and her pupils were considerate enough to leave her to enjoy them undisturbed, though they never failed to relish any news their governess might choose to tell them of the German household whose ways were all familiar to the elder girls who were Fräulein's friends. So to-night, in spite of all their interest in their own affairs, more than one of the workers round the table looked up at her curiously every now and then, anxious to guess from the expression of Miss Framm's face whether her sister Anna had passed her difficult examinations successfully, and whether Albert's perplexing love affairs had come to a satisfactory conclusion.

The clock in the hall had just struck eight, and Kate McKenzie was wondering whether her rosebuds had made any visible progress since tea-time, when Mademoiselle

placed three of her little dolls on the table to be inspected and admired.

"See! I have finished one, two, zree of my leetle ladies!"

The girls were enthusiastic in their approval; and Mademoiselle herself, with her head on one side, was regarding her work with some satisfaction, when a touch on her arm made her turn suddenly round, to see Ada standing beside her, a book of French extracts in her hand. She had entered the room very quietly, unobserved by any one except Emily Gordon, who had been watching for her so anxiously all evening that she had but little attention to give to her work. There had been a great deal of talk about Ada and her doings in the early part of the evening, but for some time the bazaar had been the only subject of conversation, and most of the party in the schoolroom had forgotten about the child altogether. But now when she appeared amongst them, pale and quiet, most of the girls felt something like remorse at the thought that their little companion's troubles had passed out of their minds so easily. A sudden silence came over them all, and Miss Framm, looking up from her letter, took in the scene at once, and stood watching Ada with grave, compassionate eyes.

"Will you show me my lines, if you please, Mademoiselle?" said Ada, speaking very gently.

Mademoiselle shrugged her shoulders almost imperceptibly, and took the book without a word. There was another pause while she turned over the leaves impatiently, and Ada, standing all by herself a little way off, kept her eyes fixed on the floor. But Mademoiselle, with scarcely the pretence of making any selection, handed her back the book, pointing to a story; and Ada, thanking her politely, walked away as quietly as she had come. No one spoke at

all till they heard the door of the opposite classroom close behind her ; then one of the girls turned round from the table and her crochet-work to ask, "Fräulein Frammchen, do you think as Kate M'Kenzie does, that Miss Maria is never wrong?"

"I think it was necessary for her to punish Ada, if that is what you mean," said Miss Framm, in the guttural tones which were the only peculiarity of her English speech.

Miss M'Kenzie had risen, and was gathering up her bundles of worsted as if to leave the room, but she waited to stand on her own defence.

"I should think no person could have any doubt about Miss Maria being in the right to-night, Nettie. But I still consider her human, so I only say she is very seldom in the wrong!"

"I beg your pardon, Kate. It is quite true, now that I think of it, that she is still human, and therefore liable to err. On Wednesday night, for instance"—Kate looked quite unconscious ; but the other girls were anxious to know what happened then, and Nettie Cathcart was easily persuaded to go on—"on Wednesday night, about a quarter to ten o'clock, as Kate M'Kenzie was returning from a visit to Mary Carr's room, and marching along the passage with her usual dignity, who should she meet but Miss Maria, face to face ! Of course Miss Maria ought to have had the proper feeling to pass on and take no notice ; but then you know, though very seldom in the wrong, as Kate says, she is still human. Therefore she behaved exactly as if she had met Ada Godfrey instead of Kate M'Kenzie, asked her severely where she had been, and gave her twenty lines forthwith for breaking rules by going to another girl's room. No ; but stop a minute ; don't laugh yet—the delicious part of the story is to come. What do

you think Miss M'Kenzie did?—Miss M'Kenzie, who is always on the side of law and order, and invariably upholds Miss Maria's authority,—she came back to our room and banged the door (just as Gerty did to-night when Kate looked so shocked); and when Maggie Murray asked innocently what was the matter, you may imagine our astonishment when we were told that Miss Maria was a *foolish, interfering woman*. These were her very words, for they were too remarkable to be forgotten!"

Kate M'Kenzie was by no means indifferent to Nettie's teasing, but she maintained an appearance of great composure, and waited in the room till the story was finished, that her departure might not look like flight.

"If you are quite done with your story, Nettie, might I trouble you to give me back my scissors, as I am going away?"

"With pleasure, Kate. There they are. And now, perhaps you will tell us if you are going to give Ada the lecture you promised her, and explain that Miss Maria is very seldom in the wrong, and certainly never when she gives *her* lines?"

"Yes, I am going to Ada in the Blue Room." There was a general outcry that it was a shame; but, without taking any notice of it, Kate collected her scattered property and went away, carrying her work with her.

The Blue Room was the smallest of all the classrooms; a little closet of a place, where the piano took up so much space that a small table and one chair were the only other furniture it held. As it was only used for a practising room, the fire had been allowed to die out, and the gas was low, so everything felt dreary and chilly to Kate M'Kenzie after the bright, warm schoolroom she had left. She made a pause at the door after she had opened it, for Ada was

sitting facing her, both her elbows on the table, and her eyes fixed on the book that was lying open before her. The poor child had evidently been crying a great deal, but she was quiet now, and did not seem even to have spirit left to be curious enough to look up and see who her visitor was. Kate did not say anything at all to her at first. She shut the door deliberately, then turned up the gas, and drawing the piano-stool to the table, sat down beside Ada, and spread out her wools. She had found the exact shade of pink she wanted, and begun to work on her roses again, before she said quietly, "Ada, I'll hear you your lines by tens, or by fives if you like. I think that may be a help to you." Ada looked up with eager words of gratitude, but Kate calmly advised her not to waste time in talking, as she had a great deal of work to do, and had been too long already in setting about her task. This was certainly true, and it was well for Ada that Miss Maria had yielded to the petition of the bazaar workers that prayers might be half an hour later that night; for though she was rather quick at learning by heart, forty lines of French prose is a long lesson, and an hour's crying anything but a good preparation for it.

Kate M'Kenzie sat beside Ada the whole time, exacting the closest attention on the little girl's part, and helping her with a skill and patience that never failed. She was not at all an impulsive girl, but almost always prudent in speech and action, so it was very seldom that her companions had the satisfaction of telling some such story about her as Nettie Catheart had related that night. Kate had no sympathy at all with Ada in her mischievous moods, but she had what she herself called a calm and judicious affection for this little girl whose father and mother were across the sea. Therefore she had counted

the cost before she left the cheerful schoolroom to sit alone with Ada; and if her thoughts wandered back there with any regret, she was determined that no one but herself should know it. Her sacrifice was by no means a small one, for of all the girls she was Miss Framm's particular confidante, and most interested in hearing of Albert and Anna. And she had little doubt that Fräulein, having finished her letter, would take up her knitting again, and making her audience select by speaking German, would gather a circle round the fire, and tell how Anna's studies were prospering with the aid of green tea drunk at nights to keep her awake. She might even go on to more interesting intelligence still, and let the girls know whether the obstinate father of Albert's ladye-love had at last given his consent to his daughter's engagement to the young soldier; yet Kate M'Kenzie, sitting beside Ada in the Blue Room, never once showed by look or tone that she found her self-elected banishment wearisome or annoying.

As the time passed on and Ada grew more and more pale and tired, Kate pitied her more than she cared to confess even to herself. As Nettie Cathcart had said, she had declared publicly her intention of speaking to Ada seriously about her conduct, but now she rather hoped there would be no time to do so. If there was time, however, she was quite determined that it was her duty to give her a grave admonition; besides, if she broke her promise and spent an hour and a half with Ada without saying a word of reproof or warning, the other girls would be sure to find it out, and rejoice and triumph accordingly. The lines were learned at last, first by fives and tens, then repeated all over from the beginning. Before half-past nine o'clock Kate M'Kenzie had heard Ada say her task correctly, and after going through it twice again to make

sure work of it, there was no excuse for putting off her lecture any longer.

"Sit still for a minute, Ada; I've something to say to you." Miss M'Kenzie laid down the French book and began to work again, that the sight of Ada's woe-begone face might not prevent her making her words severe enough. "I have no wish to be hard on you, my dear child," said she, speaking slowly and gravely, "but I think you must see yourself how very bad your behaviour has been to-night. In the first place, Ada, it was so remarkably silly; and in the second, it did a very great deal of harm indeed. I don't mean only to yourself, for you must know that without my telling you, but I mean to other people. I would like you to think of that a little. How many do you suppose of your French class got any good out of a lesson which was begun in so curious a way? As for me, it was my music-lesson time, and I was thoroughly interested in a passage in my sonata (the Moonlight Sonata, which you will like too when you are older, Ada), and there was one piece I could not get right. Herr Rieth sat down to play it to me, and I was just catching the spirit of the thing when—"

Kate had not been watching Ada's face at all, so she was completely taken aback when her impressive story was suddenly interrupted by a burst of merry laughter. Weary and dispirited as Ada was, the idea of total darkness falling upon Miss M'Kenzie and the music-master at the piano in the drawing-room, struck her as being so extremely funny that no amount of respect and gratitude could restrain her amusement. It was not in human nature, however, not to be offended when a mild and dignified little sermon was received in such a manner. Kate rose immediately and swept out of the room without a word,

before Ada could find breath to make apologies. In great indignation she retired to her own room, and shut herself up there till the bell rang for prayers; telling herself, as she walked up and down in the cold, that the patient help she had given Ada that night might surely have secured her civil attention in return. With all her heart Kate hoped that the other girls might not hear what had happened.

Poor Ada was greatly distressed when she saw what she had done, and she looked more miserable than ever when she came into the drawing-room with the others. After prayers she bade good-night to no one, but stood with her book in her hand behind Miss Maria's chair till every one else had left the room. Miss Maria had been puzzled and even a little touched by Ada's confession, made as it was unasked and with full knowledge of the consequences; but coming downstairs at the end of the evening, expecting to find her suitably impressed by her punishment, the first sound that had greeted her ears was that unlucky burst of laughter. To a child so incorrigible Miss Maria was inclined to show no mercy, and it was fortunate for Ada that, thanks to Kate M'Kenzie's kindness, her task was particularly well learned. Miss Maria first heard her repeat her lines; then bestowed on her a scolding which was certainly sharp enough, and not in the least amusing. Finishing up with the information that her monthly letter to India would carry Mrs. Godfrey a very bad report of her daughter's conduct, Miss Maria dismissed Ada to bed.

The door-bell rang, and the merry voices of the children returning from the party were heard in the hall, as Ada walked slowly along the passage to the schoolroom to put away her book in her desk. But she had still something to do before she went to her room. Kate M'Kenzie had not begun to undress when a knock came to her door; but

it was not she that opened it, but Nettie Cathcart, in a white dressing-gown, her black eyes looking blacker than usual out of a veil of curly dark hair. Kate heard Ada's voice say something in a low tone; and Nettie, turning round, called out,—“Catharina, a most wretched-looking, white-faced ghost of a creature craves speech with you for a minute.”

Kate walked across the room with her most dignified swing, Nettie Cathcart still holding the door open, and looking on with the keenest interest. “What do you want, Ada?”

“I want you to forgive me. I *am* sorry I put out the gas, and I *am* sorry I laughed. If you would *only* say the rest of what you were going to say, I would be much obliged to you—and I promise I will be very good!”

It was Kate M'Kenzie's turn to laugh now at Ada's solemn speech. “I've nothing whatever to say to you, Pussy, except—go off to bed as fast as you can. Good-night, dear.”

“This is really most edifying!” said Nettie Cathcart, mockingly. “Kate, I'll begin to think your lectures must be interesting, if your victims come after bedtime to ask for a continuation of them.—What has she been saying to you, Ada, that took an hour and a half to say, and isn't finished yet? Now, don't run away when I'm speaking, or I'll have a lecture on good manners to give you which will be quite as spicy as any of Miss M'Kenzie's.”

“Let her alone,” said Maggie Murray, with unwonted consideration. “Can't you see she's quite worn-out?”

So Ada was allowed to depart, while Nettie exercised her wits in attempts to move Kate M'Kenzie's quiet composure; teasing questions and calm retorts going on without intermission till long after the girls were in bed, and

Maggie Murray had angrily demanded silence that she might go to sleep.

Utterly worn-out Ada indeed was by this time. She had tasted no food since the early dinner; and now that the excitement of the day's events was over, the violent weeping and hard studying were beginning to tell upon her. Coming into the bedroom where Gerty was standing gravely by the fire, Ada sat down on the rug and leaned her head on the mantelpiece without saying anything. Gerty used to be told that she had no tact, and perhaps it was true; but her love for Ada made her keen-sighted enough to see that speaking to her then would be anything but kindness. Anxious as she was to talk about the party, and to hear how Ada had spent the evening in her absence, Gerty began to undress herself quietly, waiting for Ada to break the silence first. May Allardyce was to remain at home till Monday, and Mary Carr had not yet returned from her aunt's, so the two little girls had the room to themselves. Gerty, already in her night-gown, was attempting, without much success, to lay the dress she had worn smoothly in one of the drawers, and Ada was still looking into the fire with dreamy eyes and a sad mouth, when she asked at last,—

“Gerty, will you tell me something about the party?”

“Oh yes!” said Gerty, delighted. “It was a very grand affair—the grandest I was ever at; and I don't know how many were there—some of the day-scholars, and quantities of other boys and girls that I didn't know. May looked better than I thought she would, and ate ever so much to supper. There was a delightful supper; and before that we had dancing, and games, and charades, which were the best fun of all. I was an old aunt in one of the charades, and was all stuffed out with pillows to make me fat; and then—”

"Don't, please," said Ada with a sob. "I can't bear it! I would have liked to have gone so much!"

"*Dear* Ada!" said Gerty with sudden compunction, coming and kneeling down beside her.

"I can't bear it!" said Ada, speaking more gently. "You'll tell me all about it to-morrow, and I'll like to hear it then, but not just yet.—It was very quickly done, do you know, Gerty? The screw was quite easily turned; and I just put it round and back again, exactly as Jane does at ten o'clock."

Ada rose and began slowly to undress, then turning all at once to Gerty, she flung her arms round her and hid her face on her shoulder. "O Gerty, if I had only taken time to think, I never would have put out the gas, for I might have known—oh! I *might* have known what Miss Maria would do to me!"

They were only a pair of little schoolgirls, not particularly wise even for their years, and they had both the schoolgirl idea that any mischief or breach of rules was allowable, if they were willing to take the consequences. But in one thing at least they had taken a higher stand than the ordinary schoolgirl's code of honour. All Miss Martyn's pupils would have thought Ada wrong if she had told a direct lie, or allowed any one else to be blamed for her trick; but very few of them considered there would have been any harm in allowing Miss Maria to accept Mademoiselle's statement, and go away believing what was not true. Gerty was perhaps the only one, except Emily Gordon, who believed in the necessity of Ada's confession; and now remembering what Mary Carr had said, she asked, "Didn't you tell Miss Maria it wasn't water in the pipes, because you thought it was right?"

"Yes, of course that was why," said Ada, rather astonished.

“It was *awfully* good of you to do it!”

There was a pause before Ada answered, and she did not lift her head when she spoke at last,—

“If you only knew how very nearly I *didn't* do it, you never would say that!”

Gerty might have told her that the strength of the temptation made the victory won the brighter, but though some such thought did occur to her, she could not put it into words. But with unshaken loyalty to her little friend, --a loyalty which was fain to cling fast to the one good and brave thing she had done among all her faults and folly of the evening,—Gerty put her arms closer round Ada, and repeated again, “I think it was *awfully* good of you, all the same!”

CHAPTER XIV.

ONWARD AGAIN.



ACCUSTOMED as Gerty was by this time to the wonderful elasticity of Ada's spirits, the rapidity with which the painful impressions connected with that unlucky Friday evening seemed to pass from her mind astonished her friend not a little. Next morning at breakfast, Ada was as merry as ever, laughing and chattering to Gerty with a gaiety that was perfectly unaffected. Miss Maria, across the table, watched the two little girls closely; and Gerty, conscious of her disapproving glances, felt uncomfortable, and was glad when the meal was over and they could escape to the schoolroom. The girls in general did not think it at all necessary to spare Ada's feelings by refraining from any allusion to the events of last night, and if little was said about them in the morning, it was only because it was the time for letter-writing, and every one was busy. Ada herself became silent for nearly an hour over a letter to India; and Gerty, who had a very important request to make, took a long time in composing a lengthy, and, we regret to say, very blotchy epistle to her mother. After she had finished and folded it up, she took a great deal of trouble to make the envelope close firmly; and not satisfied with that, she borrowed a stick of wax from Mary Carr and sealed it carefully, lest Miss Maria's curiosity should prove stronger than her honour.

When the huge patch of red was duly impressed with Gerty's thimble, she carried the important document to the hall-table herself, instead of leaving it to be taken away with the rest of the letters before dinner. Even after it was laid all safe in the very middle of the table, so that it could not possibly be forgotten, Gerty lingered beside it lovingly; and when she returned to the school-room she looked absent and preoccupied, like one burdened with a weighty secret.

She found that the younger girls had all finished their letters, and were gathered at one of the windows watching the falling snow, which had come very opportunely, according to their ideas, as it prevented a formal walk with Miss Maria—one of the miseries of a "stay-at-home Saturday." May Allardyce's party was being eagerly discussed; and Ada, in the centre of the group, looked as animated as any. She made room for Gerty to sit beside her on her own desk (a somewhat slippery perch, where it was perfectly impossible to be comfortable), but Gerty preferred the window-ledge, in spite of the risk of knocking her elbows through the glass. Janie Leslie was just finishing an elaborate description of Mrs. Allardyce's dress when Gerty joined her companions; but Ellen Murray was getting impatient under it, and at last interrupted her rudely,—

"Oh! stop; we've had enough of that now! Nobody cares whether it was point-lace on the skirt or not. Ada, do you know that your baby told at supper before every one that you had put out the gas?"

Ada flushed a little. Gerty, telling her about the party in the early morning, had never mentioned that.

"Did they think it very dreadful?" she asked.

"Mr. Allardyce laughed awfully, and said it was a great shame to keep you at home—that you ought to have been

let off because you confessed. Perhaps you thought that too. I say, Ada, tell us if you meant it for a dodge. Really, now!"

Ada shook her head without speaking, in answer to Ellen's question; but when Molly struck in with inquiries about how she had managed her trick, she was quite willing to give her full particulars. Gerty heard now for the first time how the idea had come to Ada on spying the key in the mysterious door, and how the whole thing had been done so quickly that she had entered the schoolroom just behind M. Bornand. Ada was quite ready to talk of her miserable evening, and her punishment-lesson, as well as the success of her daring act of mischief; and she joined merrily in the laughter at her own expense. But the subject of her confession seemed always a serious one to her; she had made it because it was right, she told the girls gravely, when they asked her again why she could not have let Miss Maria believe what Mademoiselle had told her, and gone triumphant and undiscovered to the party.

"Well! I can't understand you," said Ellen Murray. "I don't see why on earth you shouldn't have let things alone, when it wasn't *you* said it was water in the pipes! You didn't use to be so particular. I'm sure you wouldn't have been so stupid six months ago, as to go and tell on yourself when you could have held your tongue."

"No, I don't think I would," said Ada softly. "But then, you know, I belong to the Lord Jesus Christ now and that makes all the difference."

Ada said this as if it were a very simple and natural thing for her to say, but it brought a sudden silence on the little company of girls. Had she taken her stand on lower ground, her words would probably have been received with a shout of laughter; but now, though Janie Leslie's face

expressed disgust, no one, not even Molly, ventured on a giggle. Ada was the first to move. She had given the reason her companions pressed her for, and she saw no need of continuing the conversation. The other girls stood aside to let her pass, and after she was gone the group separated quietly, Janie Leslie and Ellen Murray pairing off together.

Emily Gordon received a foreign letter in the evening, which kept her in her room till time for prayers; and every one was going off to bed before Gerty and Ada could find an opportunity of asking how her father was. They joined her as she was leaving the drawing-room, however, and walked with her to the door of her own room; a piece of politeness which Miss Martyn's girls were fond of showing their friends, if they happened to have anything interesting to talk about. But Emily Gordon had never been so escorted before, and she felt almost as grateful for the public sign of friendship as for the eager interest Gerty and Ada took in her news from Egypt. Mr. Gordon was better, Emily told the little girls, as they walked one on each side of her through the passages; decidedly better, and had been able to write a long letter to her—the first real letter she had received from him since he left; what he had sent her before were only pencilled notes.

Gerty and Ada both agreed in considering that this showed a remarkable improvement in Mr. Gordon's health; and Emily, talking over the good news, looked brighter than any one at Miss Martyn's school had ever seen her. But as they stood together at her bedroom door, Emily put her hands on Ada's shoulders and said gravely, "You were a dear, brave girl to say what you did in the schoolroom to-day. I am afraid I would have been coward enough to have kept silent, if such a trial had come to me."

Ada was very much astonished, and needed some explanations before she could understand what Emily meant. But when she found out that she only alluded to the conversation of the forenoon, and not to the far more difficult avowal she had made the night before, she opened her eyes wide, and replied with spirit, "Of course, I couldn't have helped saying it, when they asked me! I never was afraid of any of the girls; and neither would you be, if you wouldn't always stay away."

Emily looked dubious, but she did not contradict Ada. And as the two little friends walked back to their room together, Gerty said, "I'm glad you gave Emily a *pitch-into* about always keeping by herself! She wasn't a bit offended, and I hope it will do her good."

Perhaps it was in consequence of Ada's words—Gerty certainly thought it was—that Emily did at last make an attempt to join in the amusements of her companions. After May Allardyce's party the little girls would not be satisfied until they had acted a charade at school; and one evening, when Miss Maria was out, Mrs. Martyn was easily persuaded to give her consent, and the whole thing was arranged. The reading aloud was put off altogether that night, the rule which forbade the girls going into each other's rooms was suspended, and the whole house was thrown into disorder with the preparations for the charade. The elder girls, with Fräulein and Mademoiselle, were to be the spectators, and therefore remained quietly in the drawing-room; while the actors all assembled in Gerty and Ada's room to dress, and discuss the scenes together.

The character of the fat aunt had been considered too good not to be repeated, and Gerty, with the assistance of Janie and Ada, was attiring herself in a dress and shawl of Mrs. Martyn's, fastened over as many pillows as could be

squeezed in, when Emily Gordon appeared timidly at the door. Gerty was the first to see her, and called her immediately to come in.

"Will you play, Emily?"

"I should like it very much," said Emily, with some hesitation.

"No, no," said Ellen Murray, rather roughly; "we've got enough without you. You must go away into the drawing-room—and be quick, for we don't want you to see what we're doing."

Emily vanished instantly, but Gerty was by no means inclined to let the matter drop.

"What nonsense!" said she very angrily. Then making a great effort to control her temper, she went on in a conciliatory tone,—“You know she might be a servant—a maid to carry in the aunt's things and get her room ready. It would make it much better; for, of course, if you are fine ladies you won't want to do that! Ada, don't you think there ought to be a maid?"

"A maid is the very thing we need," said Ada; "and whenever I've put on my aunt's bonnet, I'll go and engage one, and borrow a cap and apron for her from Jane."

But Gerty and Ada encountered a perfect storm of opposition. Ellen Murray always made a point of objecting to anything that Gerty proposed, and the other girls all joined her in declaring that their fun would be all spoilt if Emily Gordon played.

"If you are really going to be so unkind and shabby as not to let Emily Gordon play," said Ada at last, "you can act your charade by yourselves. I would be ashamed to have to do with such a thing! I won't even come to look at it!"

"Nor I," said Gerty, pulling off Mrs. Martyn's things and tossing the pillows about the room.

They might do as they pleased, they were told ; they were the most ill-tempered, tyrannical girls that had ever been seen, and the charade would get on as well, even better, without them. Gerty found it hard work to keep from answering in the same style, but she did manage it ; and when Ellen Murray told her, as she was leaving the room, to let them hear again "how nicely she could bang the door," her self-restraint did not even then give way, and she went quietly out. It may be that Ellen Murray, remembering their former quarrels, thought that Gerty too, as well as Ada, had changed during the last few months ; but if she did, it made her all the more inclined to annoy her rival by every means in her power.

Ada and Gerty found Emily crying quietly, all by herself, in the schoolroom ; and when she found out what they had done, her distress was increased.

"Oh, why did you come away?" she asked piteously. "I didn't care very much about playing, but I do care that you should lose your pleasure for my sake!"

Gerty sat down beside Emily and tried to comfort her ; but she was quite unsuccessful, and after a little gave up the attempt in despair.

Poor Gerty was feeling very down-hearted herself, and had the most serious doubts whether Ada and she had acted wisely. She had tried to do right, and she did not in the least regret the sacrifice she had made—only it seemed to her that it had done more harm than good. She knew that the plans for the charade would be all spoilt by her defection and Ada's ; the younger girls were angry, and the elder ones would laugh, and the worst of it all was that Emily had only been annoyed by the disturbance

made on her account, and made to understand now better than ever how much she was disliked by her companions. Would it not have been better for them all, if Gerty had kept quiet and let things take their own course?

When Emily at last dried her tears and began to work at a water-colour picture she was making for the bazaar, Gerty went away to the window, and kneeling down on the floor, put her head under the blind and looked out. The lights of the city were shining below, and the stars were bright in the frosty sky above, but Gerty's eyes were dim with tears, and saw nothing but the darkness. Gerty had read many children's books, and she remembered now instances innumerable of the little heroes and heroines of these moral tales giving up some expected treat for the sake of another; but they had always been rewarded afterwards by a blissful sense of happiness, which poor Gerty was far from feeling. And what they did always turned out well; never, never had any of these well-meaning boys or girls been obliged to fear afterwards that their brave self-denial had been worse than useless.

Clearly there was no comfort to be got from such examples of virtue,—no help for Gerty to pass through the long, dreary evening which stretched before her to bed-time. She felt almost provoked with Ada, who had paid little attention to Emily and her tears, and was now occupying herself at the other end of the room in practising running leaps over a stool, exactly as if that were the game she had chosen for her evening's amusement. Did Ada not feel that she and Gerty had tried to do good and failed miserably? Had she forgotten that they had expected a happy evening, and been disappointed? Or perhaps Ada was sustained by that internal sense of well-doing which made

the children in the story-books so happy, and had been able to thank God for helping her to do her duty, without being troubled by any doubts as to whether she had really done it. If it were so, it was all the better for Ada; and whether she had been mistaken or not, doubtless her motives had been pure, and so it was all right with her. But Gerty's motives—what had they been? She got quite bewildered when she tried to decide how much she had been influenced by kindness towards Emily Gordon, how much by anger against Ellen Murray. Although she had kept back her angry words, her thoughts had been bad enough; and even now her whole heart rose up in a storm of passion at the thought of what her companions had said and done. Poor Gerty gave herself up in despair at last, and put her head down on her hands.

"O Lord!" she prayed earnestly, "Ada and I have been trying to do right to-night, and everything has gone wrong! Thou knowest how much I did because it was right, and how much because I was angry. Forgive me for what has been wrong—and, O Lord, *do* help Ada and me to do what is right and best!"

Gerty took heart again after that. She dried her eyes and looked up at the shining stars, wondering if the land where there shall be no more sin and no more mistakes was very far above them. And when Ada's voice called her presently, she turned round, tolerably composed, and was even able to smile at her friend reassuringly when the bright face took a look of concern at the sight of her red eyes. Ada was far too considerate to ask questions, especially as they were not alone; and Emily Gordon was busy with her drawing, so the two little girls turned their attention to Ada's gymnastics.

"Look, Gerty! I want you to see me jump over that

stool with the French Dictionary and big Shakespeare on the top."

There had been no struggle and no doubt in Ada's mind that night, simply because she was quite sure that she and Gerty would have their way before long. For more than two years she had been chief maker and leader of fun and mischief among the younger girls, and she had no fear that her followers would throw off their allegiance now. According to Ada, their submission was a mere question of time; and meanwhile the only virtue she felt herself particularly obliged to exercise was a little quiet patience. Schoolgirl abuse had very little sting for her, and as for Emily Gordon's distress, it was quite unnecessary; for what was the use of crying when everything was going to come right so soon? That Gerty, too, should be vexed, was somewhat puzzling; but understanding by instinct that this was not the time for explanations, Ada soon succeeded in interesting her in the amusement she had contrived for herself to pass away the time until the rebellion was over.

And in due time a deputation arrived, in the shape of Molly Smith. Ada, trying a higher leap than usual, touched the books as she was passing over, and brought the whole pile down with herself on the floor just as the door opened and Molly appeared. Perfectly unhurt, she rose instantly, amidst Gerty's laughter and Emily's exclamations of horror; then seeing Molly, she became serious all at once, and stood waiting in silent dignity to hear what she had to say. Molly was considerably embarrassed, and stood rubbing her shoulder against the side of the door.

"They sent me to tell you—I mean, we all sent me to tell you—I mean, we all want you to come back, for we haven't enough to play."

"If we come back, Emily Gordon comes with us," said Ada firmly.

"Oh! well—they bid me say—you might bring Miss Gordon with you."

"Not me, thank you, Ada!" said Emily, as Ada seized hold of her. "Oh! please, Gerty, tell her I would much rather not play! Indeed—indeed, it would be no pleasure to me."

"Must we begin the whole thing over again, then?" asked Ada, with sudden indignation. "I think you might surely understand by this time that if you don't play neither do we!"

This argument was irresistible. Emily submitted meekly, and was led off in triumph. Gerty was rather uncertain how their schoolfellows would behave, but was much relieved to find that they had very wisely determined to take no notice of the quarrel, and the three were received as if nothing had happened. This was the more easily done as the preparations for the charade, already too long put off, employed all their energies, and left little time for talking. And, after all, the charade turned out such a brilliant success that every one was put in good humour, and even Emily Gordon, who had looked very sad and uncomfortable at first, began to enjoy the fun in a quiet way.

But there is no doubt that if Emily had known what she was committing herself to, she would never have proposed joining her companions that evening. For night after night, whatever the game might be, Ada insisted on her taking part in it; and Emily, knowing that the wilful little maiden would certainly fulfil the threat of staying away herself if she resisted, was always obliged to comply. Only once or twice, when Gerty saw she was really being

victimised, did she interfere, and persuade Ada, sorely against her will, to let Emily escape. But there is no doubt that Emily's association with her companions did her good, not only in helping to melt away the reserve between them, but in preventing her having time to brood over her own sorrows, and torture herself with imagining future evils. After the first, her playmates treated her with tolerable civility, and sometimes even tried to make themselves agreeable; but she never drew much to any of them, except to Gerty and Ada. Gerty especially became her friend; for though Emily loved and admired Ada, she never quite understood her, and was sometimes shocked and frightened by her wilful moods and daring speeches.

Gerty did not make up her mind that her conduct had been altogether wise and good, because the kind thing she tried to do turned out well at last; but she was deeply and truly glad that the first time she had ever really tried to take a stand for the right among her schoolfellows, her attempt had been a success. And in the days that followed she was wonderfully gentle and patient with the melancholy, home-sick girl, listening to all her confidences, and cheering her in her fits of depression. Miss Maria, who watched her pupils far more closely than they had any idea of, began to observe that when Gerty was not with Ada Godfrey she was generally to be found in Emily Gordon's company—a state of things that struck her as being very curious, and made her wonder much at Gerty's taste in friends.

CHAPTER XV.

STILL ONWARD.

FULL November, with its rain and fog, had passed away, and was followed by a time of bright frosty weather. The recollection of these sunny days in the end of the year used to come to Gerty afterwards with the thought that sometimes this does seem a very happy world. These memories were of brisk walks through the frosty streets, of busy hours which flew past in school, and of merry romps in the classrooms after tea; but the pleasantest of all were associated with those evening times when the day's lessons were all over and the good-nights said. Miss Carr was certainly the most indulgent guardian possible to Gerty and Ada; she almost never scolded, at times she would laugh and chatter with them almost on terms of equality, and she even condescended so far as to request them to call her by her Christian name. This privilege was much valued, for the big girls at Miss Martyn's were very tenacious of their dignity, and any unlucky child who dared to take liberties with them was sure to be severely snubbed. May Allardyce did not share with Gerty and Ada in the young lady's favour; indeed, Mary persisted in having as little to do with that troublesome little person as possible. And May was so tired and sleepy after she came to her room at night, that, except a few peevish remarks addressed to Ada, she

seldom spoke much, and was generally in bed before the others had begun to undress.

Then, when Mary Carr had taken a book and seated herself to read at the fireside, or gone to pay a visit to Kate M'Kenzie (as she still did pretty often, in spite of the danger connected with these expeditions)—then Gerty and Ada, side by side on the rug, or sometimes curled up on the top of their beds, would enjoy the luxury of a private talk. Then they related past experiences, telling each other long stories of the time when they were “children;” or oftener still they would take to building castles in the air, and plan out their future life, “such as they wished it to be.” They would always be friends, that was one thing certain, and the five years of school-life which they calculated still lay before them would only make them love each other better. But the time for leaving school would come at last, when they had grown up to be young ladies with long dresses—magnificent creatures, treated as equals by Mademoiselle and Fräulein, and called Miss Stuart and Miss Godfrey by all, except a few intimate friends. It was scarcely possible to conceive such a state of existence, and the two little girls tried to realize it with a wondering curiosity, which was largely mingled, in Gerty's mind at least, with a kind of awe. Nevertheless that time *would* come, and with it a separation. Ada would go to her father and mother in India, and Gerty would return to Burnside; the parting would be very sad, but they would write each other letters—long letters, almost as good as talks. And then, after a little while, Major Godfrey would leave the army altogether, and bring his wife and daughter to Scotland, where they would settle down in a house near Burnside, and Gerty and Ada would see each other every day. In the course of time they would both

get married; and though their husbands were considered of such secondary importance as to be scarcely worth mentioning, much trouble was expended in arranging the difficult matter of bridesmaids, as it was unfortunately impossible that each could take the office for the other. After they were married they would visit each other at least four times a year; and their eldest daughters would be called Gerty and Ada, and grow up to be friends, as their mothers had been.

So they would go on; Gerty being chief story-teller, and drawing all the outlines—Ada sometimes assisting her to fill up her pictures, and oftener still turning the whole thing into a laugh by adding some ridiculous detail. On these occasions Gerty would recover herself first, and say gravely, "But, Ada, I do wish it. You know I really hope it will be like that."

"So do I," Ada would say, and then laugh again; "but it does seem so funny to think of us being grown-up!"

Then, when it was nearly time for the light to be put out, Mary Carr would come in from the other room, or reluctantly put away the book she was reading, and turn her attention to her charges. Then came the nightly Bible-reading, which was never omitted, though it had sometimes to be finished by the flickering blaze of the fire. And often, when their chapter was done, the three girls would sit together and talk of what they had read—Mary and Ada speaking much more than Gerty, who was always shy about her deepest feelings. But Gerty had grown to like these evening talks, one of which remained fresh in her memory long after her school-days were over for ever.

They had read earlier than usual that night, for Mary had not left the room; and now she was sitting with Gerty close beside her, and Ada lying with her head in her

lap, and her fingers twisting and twining in her long, fair hair. They had just been reading of the raising of Jairus' little daughter, and the beautiful story had struck Ada's fancy, especially after Mary told her she had heard somewhere that Talitha was a term of endearment—a pet name for a little girl.

"A pet name! O Mary, did Jesus say, 'Rise up, my pet'?"

"Well, yes—something like that."

"And the little girl heard his voice, and wakened up with her hand in Christ's, and his face looking down at her! Oh! I like that story so much—better even than the one about the children; for they were such little things, and this was a girl like Gerty and me!"

"Twelve years old—just our age," said Gerty.

"I would have liked to be that little girl who opened her eyes and saw Jesus," Ada went on. "How nice it must have been for her!"

All the time she was undressing she went on talking about the story,—wondering if this only daughter had been an only child like herself, or whether she had brothers as Gerty had. And when the gas was out, and every one had been quiet for some time, Ada's voice broke the silence with a remark about the pity it was they did not know the little girl's name.

Afterwards the story about the child who woke up and saw the face of Christ was always a favourite, and she never tired of reading how the Lord of Glory stood by the bed of a little girl, holding her hand, and speaking to her in the familiar words of human love. And being Ada's favourite story, it became of necessity Gerty's too, and was always associated with the thought of her little friend.

Poor Ada! these December days were not very bright

for her, for the holidays were to bring no change, except the relief from lessons. Her uncle and aunt had gone to Rome for the winter; and her grandmother had become so much of an invalid of late, that she considered herself quite unable to undertake the charge of a child even for a week or two. So Ada had nothing to look forward to but the prospect of a fortnight spent alone with Mrs. Martyn and Miss Maria; for Miss Martyn was in the south of England, and no other girl but Ada remained at school during the holidays. She was very brave and uncomplaining about it; but when her schoolfellows talked gleefully of their pleasant plans for the holidays, they were sorry for her, and generally only gave vent to their raptures when Ada was out of hearing. Happily for her, she was by no means given to spoil the present by dismal thoughts of the future; but between Gerty and her there were no calculations of the time still to be spent at school, and about the holidays they kept silence altogether.

"I wish we didn't have to wait till tea-time for our letters," said Gerty one afternoon, as she and Ada sat down to prepare their lessons. "I'm sure there's one for me to-day, and I'd do my work a great deal better if I only had it."

"Why, Gerty, you're not expecting another letter, surely? You had one only yesterday."

"Yes; but mamma promised to write again about something particular—something she couldn't tell me about then. I wish we were in a school where there were no rules!"

"That would be an exceedingly nice school," said Ada, laughing; "a very nice school—only not Miss Maria Martyn's!"

Gerty and Ada had fallen upon the plan of preparing

their lessons together,—a plan which worked very well, on the whole, and certainly made study easier and more interesting to a lively, restless child like Ada. If repeating to each other what they had to learn by heart took up some time, it certainly fixed their task more securely in their memories; and when it came to translation, two heads and two dictionaries were certainly better than one, and made the work go on much faster. To-day their history-lesson was a long list of dates, and both little girls had pored over their books for some considerable time before Ada at last shut hers with a clap and announced that she was ready. Ada was generally ready first, according to her own account; but it was not very safe to trust to her, and so it was the custom for her to hear Gerty say her lesson before she repeated hers. But this afternoon it was different; for when Gerty handed Ada her book a few minutes afterwards, she got on so badly that she had to give up the attempt.

“It’s that letter, Ada. I can’t help thinking about it.”

“Well, but you know, Gerty, William the Conqueror did *not* begin to reign in eighteen hundred and sixty-six.”

“Oh! that was a slip—not so bad as some of my other mistakes. I wouldn’t lose a place for that. But give me the book, and I’ll drill you first; I’ll know them better after that.”

“No; please go on just now, Gerty. I like to hear you say things of that sort, and it’s not often I have the pleasure.”

“Give me the history, and let me have the pleasure. I can’t say it, and we’re only losing time.”

Ada was obliged to give in; and after Gerty had heard her repeat the dates over several times, she tried again herself, and this time more successfully.

"I don't know them yet," said she, as she laid aside her book; "but I'll look them over in the morning. Oh! my letter, my letter!"

Grammar and French were alike tedious to Gerty that night, and when they came to sums Ada was finished before she had put down half-a-dozen figures. Ada, with a generosity which was quite blind to the dishonesty of the act she proposed, suggested that Gerty should copy from her; and as she was very quick at arithmetic, and almost invariably right in her answers, there would have been little risk in doing so.

But Gerty was roused into a state of indignant horror. "Surely you don't think I would be such a wretch as that! It would be bad enough to take the good of your work from you, but far worse to make Mr. Wilson think it was mine!"

"I beg your pardon, Gerty. I didn't mean to make you angry."

"I know *you* wouldn't do it, Ada; but you let Janie Leslie copy all your sums the other day when she asked you, and I don't think it was right of you!"

Ada made no answer. She was very sensitive to a rebuke from Gerty, but she and most of her companions had the idea that there was no harm in copying from a person whose leave was first granted. She considered the answers to her sums as her own private property, which it would be stealing for any one to take without her permission, but which she had quite a right to give away if she chose. Now that the whole affair had been presented to her in a new light, she sat thinking over it in silence, while Gerty finished her sums in hot haste, having forgotten her letter for the time being.

The last sum came to an end as the tea-bell rung. Gerty

tumbled her books into her desk and went to the dining-room with Ada. As they left the schoolroom she gave her hand a squeeze, as a sort of apology for the heat of her words; and as such Ada understood it, for she asked immediately,—

“Are you sure it would have been wrong to do it?”

“Quite sure,” said Gerty emphatically. “As bad, and a great deal worse, than if you had let Miss Maria think there was something wrong with the gas-pipes.”

Gerty's hopes were not disappointed, for a letter, addressed in her mother's handwriting, was lying beside her plate. Contrary to her usual custom, Gerty made no attempt to open it under the table, so as to get a peep at the contents while tea was going on. It was consigned immediately to her pocket; but Gerty had very little appetite that night, and as soon as the girls had left the dining-room she rushed off to her own room and shut herself in. Ada, who had been perfectly conscious of Gerty's suppressed excitement during tea-time, was perhaps a little hurt that she had not been taken into confidence, although she had no doubt that Gerty's anxiety was all about some of these holiday pleasures which were never mentioned before her. Feeling rather forlorn, Ada wandered away from the other girls; and when Gerty came to seek her a few minutes after, she found her all alone in the Blue Room, playing snatches of tunes on the piano.

Ada did not turn round or stop her music; and Gerty, standing silently behind her, kept time with her hand on the back of the chair for a minute.

“Ada, are you going to your Aunt Laura's for Christmas?”

Ada went on playing; but when her answer came, it was with something more like a sob than a laugh.

"It would be rather too long a journey, don't you think?"

"But she might come home."

"Yes; when Uncle Fred's picture is finished, she will come home. But that won't be for months and months."

"Will you go to your grandmamma's, then?"

"Grandmamma doesn't want me."

Ada gave up her song tunes, and beginning to play one of her school pieces, became too much occupied with the chords and runs to be able to talk till it was finished. When it came to an end at last with a triumphant crash, Ada made a pause, with her fingers still on the piano, and asked how Gerty liked her last new piece.

"Well enough, I suppose. I wasn't listening," said Gerty, rather impatiently. Then putting her own hands over Ada's to prevent her again making the piano interrupt their conversation, she said rapidly,—“Ada, I wrote to mamma a while ago to ask her something. And she said I might; but she would write to Miss Maria, and I'd better not say anything about it. And so she wrote to Miss Maria, and Miss Maria said ‘yes;’ and mamma has written to me that she said ‘yes;’ and so—you're not to play, Ada—it only remains with you.”


"With me!" said Ada, who had no idea what Gerty's rather confused speech was tending to. "With me, Gerty!"

"Yes—yes—yes—with you. Oh! dear Ada—will you come to Burnside for the holidays?"

Ada turned in an instant, with that sudden flush in her cheeks which made her look so pretty. And Gerty, putting her arms round her, read her answer in her eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

A VERY PLEASANT PART OF THE WAY.

ERTY did not fail to exhort Ada to be very good during the time they had still to remain at school, in case Miss Maria might find an excuse to interfere, and forbid her going to Burnside. The thought that Miss Maria was very well pleased to enjoy her holidays in peace, undisturbed by any of her pupils, would have seemed very strange to Gerty, who imagined it must be a real grief to her to spend even a fortnight without some one to lecture and instruct. She had not yet got over the childish impression that giving holidays at all is a bitter thing to teachers,—a concession unwillingly wrung from them, and therefore all the more precious to their scholars. Ada used to laugh at Gerty's fears for her; but there was no doubt that she also shared them in a measure, and both little girls felt they would not be safe till they were really in the train, steaming away from the city and Miss Martyn's school.

The bazaar which the girls had been preparing for so busily came off on the last Saturday before the holidays. All the evening and most of the morning before, they were occupied in decorating the schoolroom with evergreens, and arranging the tables as effectively as possible; and at two o'clock the bazaar was, as the girls said, open, and the visitors began to arrive.

They were all relations and friends of Miss Martyn and her pupils, and the assembly was a very merry one. Much interest was excited by May Allardyce's pretty mother, who came early and remained late, chatting gaily with the girls, and making many purchases of the most varied kind. May hung to her dress the whole time, and told stories about her companions in a shrill high-pitched voice which made them audible to all around; but she had the grace to introduce Ada as a girl who helped her with her buttons, and Ada took advantage of the opportunity to make Mrs. Allardyce buy Kate M'Kenzie's famous cushion. The Murrays' mother and elder sister also appeared, and were very loud in their praises of everything, from the evergreens on the wall to the manners of the young ladies; but they did not buy much after all, and were in every way a contrast to Emily Gordon's aunt, who was dressed with almost Quaker simplicity, talked in a low voice of the Kaffir schools for whose benefit the bazaar was intended, and spent a good deal of money entirely on such things as seemed unlikely to find another purchaser.

Gerty, who was perfectly aware that nothing but her mother's excessive indulgence to herself would have made her consent to introduce into her peaceful household a creature reported to be so dangerous as Ada, was very anxious that her friend should produce a favourable impression on her this afternoon. But she was relieved to find that the two seemed to understand each other from the very first; and Ada took it as a matter of course that she should take charge of Mrs. Stuart when her daughter could not be with her. She fetched her a chair from the Blue Room, which Gerty had never thought of doing, though all the other seats were occupied; and after she was placed comfortably near the fire, Ada stood beside her and talked

without the least shyness all the time Gerty was acting as assistant to Miss Carr at her table. When Gerty came to take her place and send Ada away to be saleswoman in her turn, she found her mother's opinion of her friend was almost as high as she could have wished.

"You see, mamma," said Gerty, "of course I could only tell you about the rows we got into, because that is all there is to make a story about. But I knew well enough you didn't know what like Ada was. She isn't a bit like me."

"No, she is certainly not like you," said Mrs. Stuart, smiling; but immediately afterwards she looked grave as she was watching Ada, and Gerty wondered what she was thinking about. She forgot all about it, however, when her mother proposed that the little girls should return with her to Burnside that afternoon, as she did not like to think of their travelling alone on Tuesday. And, strange to say, Miss Maria made no objection to the plan when she understood that neither Mr. nor Mrs. Stuart could come for them next week; so it was arranged immediately, and nothing was wanting to complete Gerty's satisfaction.

The bazaar was not yet over, but all interest in it was gone for Gerty and Ada, who rushed to their room to get their packing done as fast as possible.


Gerty had some hopes that they would be able to escape without seeing Miss Maria again, but they were scarcely ready when Jane appeared to summon them to the drawing-room, where they found Mrs. Stuart engaged in a private talk with Mrs. Martyn and her daughter. Miss Maria took leave of the children kindly enough, and even expressed a hope that they would enjoy their holidays; but when she sent Ada back to her room to put on a veil in case she might catch cold, Gerty was seized with a sudden

horror lest anxiety for her health might serve as a pretext for detaining her. Leaving her mother explaining that they would drive from the station to Burnside in a close carriage, she hurried into the passage to wait for Ada, and prevent her running the risk of entering the drawing-room again. All the way down stairs she clutched her fast, lest some evil spirit should prompt her to slide down the balusters, or again interfere with the gas. But they reached the hall-door in safety, and were presently followed by Mrs. Stuart, without Miss Maria, who seemed to have made no effort to recapture her prisoners.

The journey to Burnside was speedily and satisfactorily accomplished, but Gerty could scarcely think herself safe even when her father lifted her out of the carriage at their own familiar station, and she received an ecstatic welcome from two little boys and a long-haired terrier waiting for her on the platform. It was almost too good to be true that she and Ada had really escaped from school, and were together in the home-world where Miss Maria's voice was never heard. She hugged her brothers and Skye in a bewildered way ; and when they were all packed into the carriage for the short drive through the gathering darkness, she was almost afraid she would awake and find all her happiness was only a dream.

CHAPTER XVII.

SMOOTH PLACES FOR EMILY GORDON.

T would take too long to tell how the two little girls spent their holidays at Burnside, where they were as happy as it was possible for two little girls to be. Besides, it is with Gerty and Ada's school-days we have to do, and so we must pass over that delightful fortnight,—merely telling how it slipped away only too quickly, and the morning on which they were to return to Miss Martyn's came at last. The little girls went away bravely, trying hard to be glad that their holidays had been so pleasant, instead of grumbling because they were over; but there is no doubt they returned to school somewhat heavy-hearted.

One great consolation there was in the fact that Ada's knowledge of her friend's home was no longer by hearsay, and Gerty could have the pleasure of talking about Burnside to one who had been there, and cherished the most affectionate remembrance of that dear house and its inmates. Gerty and Ada used to tell stories about their holidays every night to Mary Carr for weeks after; and she bore the infliction very patiently, even when the same incident was sometimes related to her several times. But, after all, their greatest satisfaction was in their talks with each other—talks which went on at intervals during the day though they were longest and pleasantest at night.

Nevertheless Gerty and Ada did by no means exhaust all their energies in talking about Burnside; they had other and more serious work to do, and they set about it earnestly. From Christmas to Easter was generally the busiest time at Miss Martyn's school, and the marking for the prizes began after the holidays. Ada, who had come back from Burnside looking better and stronger than she had done for months, took up her lessons with more spirit than Gerty had ever seen her do before. As for Gerty, she was as much interested and excited about her studies as if the prize-giving time was near already. She marked the whole class in a note-book for herself, carefully adding up the results at the end of every week, so that no mistake could possibly be made. Her great wish was that she and Ada should stand highest in their class that year, and the renewed attention Ada was giving to her lessons made Gerty's hopes very bright. In spite of the plan of studying with Gerty, Ada had often been weary and languid in her efforts before Christmas; but Gerty thought with delight that lately she had not even once complained of a headache in the afternoon, and her lessons seemed to go on smoothly.

One Friday night, the second week after they had gone back to school, Gerty and Ada were together in one of the smaller classrooms, where Gerty had escaped to count up her marks in silence and solitude. Ada had followed to enlist her for a game of Proverbs, and was waiting rather impatiently until Gerty's business had come to a conclusion and she was ready to join the other girls. There was not much counting to be done, but Gerty went over it again and again, to be certain she was right, before she shut up the book at last, and exultantly told Ada to guess what the result of her calculations was.

"You're first, I hope," said Ada, rather carelessly.

"I'm first, and you're second ; Ellen Murray's third."

"O poor Ellen!" said Ada, in a tone of such unaffected pity that Gerty's triumph was somewhat abated.

"I don't see any reason why you should be sorry for *her*."

"Only that it seems such a pity, when she cares so much about it, and I don't care at all!"

Gerty bit her lip with vexation. "Then I suppose you'll try and do as ill as you can next week, and be lowest in the whole class—for I can tell you a great many care about their places besides Ellen Murray."

"Oh no! I won't do that," said Ada, laughing. "But, Gerty, it's only these composition exercises that have made Ellen so low this week; she'll be above me again, and very likely some of the others too. Only she will care about being down, even for a week; so you won't tell her, will you, Gerty? And I would rather you wouldn't tell me about the marks either."

"But, Ada, you *ought* to care."

"Perhaps I ought, but I don't know—I can't help it. It's quite different with you and some of the others, because you like your lessons as well as trying for the prizes. But I don't care about being first—not a bit; and lessons are always tiresome to me."

"Well; but you know it's *right* to do your lessons and work at them—hard too!"

"I know, I know. And I do try,—I do indeed,—but they worry me and make me tired; only not so much since we came from Burnside, and your doing lessons with me makes it easier. But I can't like them even yet; and often, especially at night when I'm lying awake, and remember all that has to be done in the day-time, it's so nice to think there shall be no lessons in heaven!"

"It doesn't say that in the Bible," said Gerty, rather scandalized.

"No ; but it's true for all that."

"Well, if it is, I'll be rather sorry."

Gerty spoke rather from her present mortification and disappointment than from any opinion she had formed about a subject that had never occurred to her before, but Ada was a good deal taken aback by her unsympathizing incredulity. She looked saddened and perplexed for a minute, while Gerty sat somewhat sulkily, scribbling with a pencil on the back of her note-book.

"But it *is* true—at least for me," said Ada, brightening up at last. "For there's a text in the Bible says there shall be no more sorrow and no more crying ; and I'm sure lessons are a sorrow to me, and sometimes—especially the punishment ones—a crying too!"

Ada finished up with a laugh at herself and her troubles, which was so merry that Gerty could not help joining in it. She said nothing more to Ada then ; but she was very unwilling to give up her pet scheme, even when time showed that Ada had judged her own abilities and Ellen Murray's correctly. Gerty restrained herself from telling Ellen how the marks stood ; indeed, she tried to make herself particularly agreeable to her during the week that followed ; but the way that her civilities were received convinced her that, whether her rival also kept a private register or not, she was perfectly aware of the state of matters.

Emulation is apt to be very eager in a school where prizes are given, but it is doubtful whether any system could prevent the temptation of ambition to a nature like Gerty's. But this little girl, who was beginning to learn that there are better things to be won than school honours, tried hard not to give in to the jealous dislike of her rival

and the passionate desire to be first which had gained complete possession of her the year before. Sometimes it seemed as if her struggles were perfectly unsuccessful, and the old feelings were all as strong as ever. She feared very much that it was so on this night of her talk with Ada; and afterwards she paid less attention to her book of marks, and tried hard not to think so much about the prizes. Perhaps, after Gerty's first irritation was past, she over-rated the merit of Ada's feelings towards her companions, not understanding that her friend's temptations and trials in this difficult matter of lessons lay quite in an opposite direction from her own. She astonished Ada by telling her that she had given her a rebuke,—a piece of information which was received with some amusement, Ada saying that she thought *she* was the one who had been scolded.

Things in general were not very bright at Miss Martyn's school just then, for a long time of stormy weather, which confined the girls almost constantly to the house, was sorely trying to their temper and spirits. Colds, in various degrees of severity, were abundant. Miss Maria herself had a touch of influenza; May Allardyce took to bed for several days; and Maggie Murray with a swollen face and sore throat was so savage to every one, especially her sister, that it was fervently wished she also would confine herself to her room for a time. Gerty and Ada were among the few that kept tolerably well; being cheerful was out of the question, when the general atmosphere of depression made even Mary Carr cross and Nettie Cathcart silent.

Mrs. Martyn used to look sadly over the tea-cups at the vacant places round the table, and was nearly affected to tears one evening when she counted six absentees. Gerty thought Emily Gordon ought to have been away too, for

she had been coughing and shivering in the schoolroom all afternoon, though nothing would persuade her to go to bed and leave her lessons. She had got a letter now, Gerty observed with satisfaction, and it was to be hoped it would do her good, for it evidently came from abroad, and must bring news of her father. Emily would never have attempted to read it under the table, as the other girls constantly did in similar circumstances, but her wistful looks attracted the attention of Mrs. Martyn, who said kindly, "Open your letter, my dear; we'll excuse you this once. We know you are anxious for news."

Ada came running in just then, undeniably late and liable to punishment; but Miss Maria was not present, and Mrs. Martyn received her apologies with a smile. "Did she think there was anything poor little May would care for? was all that was said to Ada. Yes, May had expressed some wishes—marmalade, she would like, and little biscuits; and if Mrs. Martyn had any sponge-cake, she thought she could eat a pretty big piece.

"Your baby seems to be recovering, Ada," observed Miss M'Kenzie.

"Which is the coolest—message or messenger?" Nettie Cathcart asked Mary Carr, loud enough to be heard all over the table.

May was quite right to tell what she wanted, and Ada was right too, Mrs. Martyn said. And she stopped pouring out the tea, to give Jane the keys and send her off for the good things which had been mentioned, remarking that she thought they might all enjoy a piece of cake that night; a suggestion that was highly approved of. "We have none of us been very well lately," said Mrs. Martyn, looking affectionately round the group of laughing girls, who were all thinking how nice it was when Miss Maria did not

come to tea,—“and when people are not well, they take fancies for things.”

“I feel quite well,” said Gerty in an aside to Ada, “but I *have* a fancy for cake.”

“Your friend Miss Gordon would be shocked at you,” said Janie Leslie. “I’m sure she thinks it more pious to eat bread than cake, and I only wonder she doesn’t think it wrong to take butter!”

“Yes, so many poor people have no bread at all,” said Ellen Murray in a sort of dolorous whine.

Mrs. Martyn and Miss Framm were talking to each other at one end of the table, and Mademoiselle at the other was surrounded by the elder girls, so Janie and Ellen were perfectly free to exchange remarks on Emily’s supposed opinions without being overheard by any but their companions. Many a time before had poor Emily been compelled to hear herself discussed by the girls around her, who did not even lower their voices, and indeed had every intention that she should have the benefit of their conversation. But of late this most annoying method of attack had been almost entirely given up, and Gerty, who had had some experience of such teasing herself during her early days at school, was excessively indignant to see it renewed again to-night with as much spirit as ever. Her only comfort was that Emily seemed so much absorbed in her letter as to be unconscious of the silly, spiteful speeches and pointless jokes which were passing from one to another around her.

“It’s almost as wicked to like nice things to eat as to like nice things to wear, I suppose.”

“Yes, of course. Do you see what an awfully long letter she’s got? Her mamma’s telling her all about her spring dresses.”

Ellen craned her neck over the table, and pretended to read from the back of Emily's letter:—" 'My dearest child,'—no, 'my beloved child—my beloved child, I hear that dresses in Scotland are worn bunchy at the back; therefore you must get yours bunchy in front. They are far more religious that way. Don't on any account get a hat, as I'm going to bring you an Egyptian turban.' "

This last piece of wit was received with a great deal of laughter, in which even some of the elder girls joined; and Molly Smith, seated beside Emily, was nearly choking with amusement. Ellen Murray leaned back in her chair with an air of satisfaction, and informed her admirers that was exactly the sort of thing Mrs. Gordon wrote to her daughter.

"But heathens wear turbans—she wouldn't want her to be like *heathens!*" suggested some one.

"You stupid girl! don't you know it doesn't matter *who* she's like, if she's not like common, ordinary people? Besides, the people in the Bible wore turbans."

"You think you're funny, but you're not," said Gerty, glaring at Ellen over her tea-cup.

After all, there were decided disadvantages connected with Miss Maria's absence, and Gerty was beginning to get almost angry with Mrs. Martyn, sitting so placidly behind the tea-kettle, and thinking no evil. Miss Maria was never so much interested in anything as to forget to watch the behaviour of her pupils; and this witty conversation, with its accompanying giggles, could not possibly have gone on under her eyes. But there was no hope of help from Mother Hubbard.

On former occasions Ada had sometimes succeeded in setting things to rights, generally by skilfully turning the conversation; but to-night she did not interfere at all.

She was watching Emily's face for a look which might tell her something of the contents of the letter she was reading so slowly, and Ellen Murray and her amiable remarks were unnoticed by her. The gauntlet which Gerty had thrown down was not taken up by Ellen, who knew that, by continuing her attack on Emily, she annoyed her rival much more than if she had turned on her, and had what Gerty would have called a "fair fight."

It was Emily herself who brought silence and dismay on her tormentors—Emily, who looked up on a sudden with quivering lips, and a bewildered look in her eyes; then rose without a word to any one, and left the room sobbing. She was usually so quiet and gentle, that every one stared in surprise, and Ellen Murray and company looked horrified and conscience-stricken.

"Poor Miss Gordon!—poor, poor girl! She's got bad news, I'm afraid," said Mrs. Martyn, in compassionate tones.

The girls were all frightened into quietness, till, after a minute, Maggie Murray suggested, "Perhaps they didn't write to her on black-edged paper so as not to frighten her at first, you know." There was a general cry of "Hush!" the reason of which Miss Murray could by no means understand. Except Mrs. Martyn, who talked in a low voice to Miss Framm about the Gordon family, no one said another word about Emily or her affairs. Tea was finished in almost complete silence, most of the girls feeling uncomfortable enough.

"It's something in her letter. It's sure to be something in her letter," Janie Leslie kept repeating uneasily, when they had gone back to the schoolroom. The girls who had laughed at tea-time were all inclined to be ashamed of themselves, and showed their penitence by blaming Ellen and

Janie severely. Mary Carr poured forth a torrent of indignation on the subject of their heartlessness and vulgarity, and declared that she was never so much inclined to appeal to Miss Maria; and would do it, too, if she heard another unkind word about Emily Gordon. Ellen took her lecture very sulkily, but Janie Leslie was cowed and frightened, and Miss Carr's own conscience was somewhat quieter. She had listened to the talk at tea-time with contemptuous amusement, but she was perfectly aware that then, and often before, she, who knew more of Emily Gordon than most of the others did, should have had something to say on her behalf. To be sure, she had often laughed at Emily herself in days gone by; but then it was one of Mary's favourite boasts that, when once convinced she was wrong, she was ready to acknowledge her mistake immediately. And it was some time now since she had found reason to regret that she had ever sneered at Emily Gordon.

Gerty and Ada had separated from the others as they left the dining-room, and went upstairs together slowly and gravely. Gerty felt she could scarcely trust herself in Ellen Murray's company just then, and May Allardyce was almost as intolerable; so she stood still at the top of the staircase and leaned her arms on the railing. Ada, a few steps lower, stopped too, and Gerty asked abruptly,—

"Ada, what do you think's the matter with Emily?"

"I don't know; I wish I did. And we can't go to her, Gerty, for Mother Hubbard is with her."

"I hope," said Gerty, doubtfully, "I hope her father isn't worse." She bit her lip, and began rubbing her hand up and down the railing, feeling almost ready to cry.

"It can't be that, Gerty, because you know we have been asking God to make him well."

"Yes, we have," said Gerty, a good deal relieved; "I

don't *think* it can be that. But I'd like to know what it really is, for she wasn't listening to the girls."

But Ada had no more idea than Gerty what Emily's trouble could be, and the conference was brought to an end by a shrill voice calling for Ada. Gerty followed her into their room, where they found May sitting up in bed, wrapped in a blue flannel dressing-gown, and ready to greet them with her favourite adjective, "You *nasty* Ada! You've left me alone so long, and you knew I was wanting a story!"

Oh how slowly the next half-hour passed, while Gerty sat waiting for Mrs. Martyn to return from Emily's room! The room was very quiet, for Ada, on the floor beside May's bed, was telling the story of the "Pilgrim's Progress," and for once her troublesome baby was silent and content Gerty paid a sort of half attention, secretly wondering a little what May would say if she knew she was listening to a Sunday story, but waiting too intently for the sound of footsteps to give much heed to anything else. For a long time she heard nothing but the sound of Ada's voice, as she went on with the tale in her rapid, fluent way, never once having to pause for a word. Gerty had left the door a little bit open to listen, and every now and then she went out into the passage and came back again restlessly, wondering why Mrs. Martyn remained so long with Emily. It was not till Christian had been brought safely in at the Wicket Gate, and Gerty's patience was nearly worn out, that some one came along the passage with quick, light footsteps, which were certainly not Mother Hubbard's, and tapped at the bedroom door.

"O Emily! we were expecting Mrs. Martyn, and it's you!" said Gerty rather awkwardly.

But sensitive as Emily was, she knew her friend too

well to be at all hurt by this peculiar welcome, and the violent squeeze Gerty gave her hand was an intelligible sign of sympathy.

"Mrs. Martyn allowed me to come to you for a little," said Emily. "I may come into your room, and stay till it is time for reading, if you like."

Of course they liked. Ada had made a spring from the floor, and stood looking at Emily with bright, expectant eyes; while Gerty shut the door and put herself against it, as if determined to keep out all intruders. There were still tears on Emily's dark eyelashes, but her lips were smiling, and there was a tone of gladness in her voice that reassured her friends.

"I am afraid you thought I was sad, when I have only had good news," said she gently. "I think tears of joy come faster than other tears. I couldn't cry at all when papa and mamma went away. But now——" Her voice quivered, and Gerty and Ada, coming nearer, each took one of her hands.

"Then, Emily, your father is better?"

"So much better that he and mamma are coming home. They will be in England at Easter, and the children and I are to meet them there. We will be all together again. God has been very good to us."

For once, it was not Ada but Gerty who spoke first, her own eyes filled with tears, and her voice unsteady, as she told her friend how glad she was. Ada had her head down on Emily's shoulder, and her face hidden. She did not say anything at all for a little, and her silence brought a sudden thought to Emily and Gerty that the time of her separation from her parents had still to be counted by years. Emily felt almost selfish in her own great happiness; and Gerty, who had never known what it was to spend a month with-

out seeing her mother, thought, with a sort of horror, of the fate of the little girl left for long years at school, growing up a stranger to those who loved her best. But it was only a minute before Ada looked up brightly. "It's very nice, Emily. Gerty and I have been wishing for this so much."

Then she turned away quickly and went to May, who was not in the least interested in the state of Mr. Gordon's health, and was only indignant at being left unnoticed so long. And Emily, sitting down with Gerty, began to tell the arrangements for the family reunion in some warm place in the south of England; while Gerty listened with an interest that was very keen, though the only way she manifested it was by repeating at intervals the single and not particularly original remark, that she was "very glad."

"But, Ada, when Christian got in at the *Wicked Gate*, what sort of a road did he find? Was it nasty?"

May's question made rather an annoying interruption in the conversation; but Ada, who knew there would be no peace for any one till her curiosity was satisfied, answered immediately,—

"Sometimes it was, but not always. Sometimes he found it difficult to get on at all; but then there were other parts where the road was very smooth—all among grass and lilies—very nice places."

And Gerty, to whom the beautiful allegory was something more than a fairy tale, looked up quickly, and meeting Emily's glance, knew that the same thought had struck them both. Ada seemed entirely engrossed in rather unsuccessful attempts to make May's tumbled clothes smooth and comfortable; and the blankets were all tucked in with great trouble if not skill, before she added,—

"And then in the Celestial City, at the end of the road, it was *all* nice!"

"You'll tell me more to-morrow," said May; "and if you read any other stories when you were at Burnside, you must tell me them all. I wish you would take that nasty girl out of my room now, for I'm sleepy."

Emily Gordon's path that night was smoother than Gerty could have believed possible. Mrs. Martyn did not fail to inform the girls what news her letter had brought her; and Emily's affairs had been very fully and freely discussed before she appeared in the drawing-room. Many of her companions had known very little of her history before, and almost none of them had realized her troubles in the midst of the general impression that Emily was low-spirited and peculiar, and decidedly given to be righteous over-much. There were parties and divisions enough among Miss Martyn's schoolgirls, but there were times when they seemed animated by one spirit, and to-night there was nothing but sympathy for Emily Gordon. Even Ellen Murray was secretly remorseful on hearing the story of Mr. Gordon's illness, which was new, at least, to her; and Janie Leslie would have expressed a kindly interest in it, if her first attempt to do so had not been severely snubbed by the elder girls.

They were all assembled in the drawing-room, waiting for Mademoiselle to commence the evening reading, when Emily Gordon entered with Gerty. Mary Carr rose immediately and kissed her, saying warmly how glad she was that her father was better. One by one they followed her example, all of them speaking kindly, some with tears in their eyes. It was the first time that Emily sat down with her assembled schoolfellows with the feeling that they were friends as well as companions; but she found a place for

herself beside Gerty and Ada, who were bound to her by a closer tie. And among the girls that rejoiced that night in the joy of another, the two who were happiest for Emily's sake did not forget to thank God, who had remembered their friend in her trouble, and in his own great goodness and mercy given her the wish of her heart.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LITTLE FRIENDS ARE PARTED FOR A WHILE.



THE reaction which had set in towards Emily Gordon in the feelings of her companions was very strong, and the effects of it never wore off. The girls began henceforth to consider her one of themselves ; she was no longer Miss Gordon, but Emily, and the objectionable title of Saint Emilia, first coined by Nettie Cathcart, and eagerly adopted by some of the younger girls, fell into complete disuse. Perhaps it would be too much to say she ever became popular. Her gentle goodness had its own influence, but she was far too timid and quiet to gain the power over her schoolfellows which Ada possessed as pet and princess ; she never even gained the standing Gerty took among them in after-years, when the first prejudice against her had long ago given way to respect and affection. Yet it became the fashion at Miss Martyn's to treat Emily Gordon politely ; and as time went on, many a girl learned to admire the humility which never spoke harshly of others, and the unselfish kindness which was ever ready to help any one in trouble.

The anxiety to atone for past unkindness was very great for several days after Emily's sudden emotion had given her companions a glimpse of her real feelings, and this was very distinctly shown the first day that the state of the weather allowed the girls to go out again for a forenoon

walk. Colds and coughs had been gradually disappearing; the bright morning had put every one in good spirits, and tempted Mrs. Martyn to break up the school-work an hour earlier, to give time for a longer walk.

Mademoiselle was generally the last to be ready, and while waiting for her in the hall the girls used to settle who their companions would be—a matter which was supposed to be arranged by their governess, but was, nevertheless, almost invariably left to themselves. The important affair was being settled when Gerty appeared on the scene, and joined Ada, who was standing at the table a little way from the rest of the party.

“Stand here for a minute, Gerty, and you’ll see girl after girl going up to Emily and asking her to walk with them. I’ve counted four already—and there’s Janie now. Isn’t it funny?”

Gerty muttered something that sounded like “hypocrite,” and expressed a hope that Emily would refuse the offer, but she could not help joining in Ada’s amusement.

“Oh no, she won’t go with Janie. She was engaged to Mary at breakfast-time!”

“I’m glad of that. You’re going with me, aren’t you?”

“Yes, of course,—you and I together.”

It was one of those lovely days which sometimes come even in the middle of winter, when it is difficult to believe that snow and rain or cold winds will ever return again. The walk was prolonged far into the suburbs of the town, where Gerty compared the houses standing in gardens with Burnside, always to the advantage of the latter, and made calculations when the snowdrops would come up. They were not even peeping above the ground as yet; but the sight of some Christmas roses, growing in a plot in front

of one of the smaller houses, made Ada exclaim with delight; and a little old lady with a kindly face, who was gathering the flowers, came forward and handed them to the little girl through the garden railings. Mademoiselle was shocked at the disorder the procession was thrown into by Ada's stopping to receive her gift; but an apology from the old lady made her all politeness again, and the child's pleasure in her flowers was so great that she had not the heart to scold her afterwards.

"They are so white and so beautiful, and the old lady was so good. I wonder if she was at school when she was little, and knows that we don't get flowers. I never had Christmas roses in my hand before!"

"Yes; but what would Miss Maria say, if she knew that you did admire things so loud that it was necessary to give them to you?"

"Dear Mademoiselle, the old lady was quite close!" said Ada in her most coaxing tone; "and you shall have some of the very prettiest to put in your hair to-night."

"Go, go; you know you are naughty," said Mademoiselle, half amused and half angry at this flagrant attempt at bribery and corruption. So Ada carried her flowers home in triumph, undisturbed by further remarks from her governess.

The girls had been making plans for spring all morning; but the beginning of February is rather soon to expect settled weather, and while they were still a long way from home the sky clouded over suddenly and the wind rose. The air, which had felt so warm in the sunshine, became cold and keen, and a violent shower of hail came on in a few minutes. Umbrellas and waterproofs had not been thought of, and there was nothing for it but to hurry home as fast as possible. Gerty, whose country breeding had

made her hardy, laughed at first; but she was soon reduced to silent endurance, as the cutting wind took away her breath, and the hailstones stung her cheek and melted in her hair. She gave a gasp of intense relief as they reached Miss Martyn's door at last, and the cold, forlorn-looking company entered the warm hall—Ada, with her wet hair all blown about her face, still sheltering her precious flowers behind her muff.

Mrs. Martyn met them at the top of the staircase with many lamentations about the unexpected change in the weather, and the girls were sent off to their rooms, with express orders to change their wet things as fast as possible. It is never pleasant to disrobe with cold, stiff fingers, and when the garments to be taken off are wet and clammy the operation is peculiarly disagreeable. May Allardyce sat down on the floor and cried, letting Ada undress her, as if she had been the baby they called her, without even moving a hand to help herself. And when the other girls, having proceeded with their necessary duties in grim silence, were ready to leave the cold room, May had just been got into a dry frock, the fastening of which she had interrupted to make Ada rub her hands. Ada's kindness to May had been so long taken as a matter of course by her companions, that even when Mary Carr realized she had not yet taken off her own hat and jacket, she did not feel herself called upon to interfere in the matter, further than bestowing a little abuse on May's selfish laziness. Gerty would have tried to give some assistance, but she offered so ungraciously that May screamed out she was not to touch her; and Ada persuaded her to follow Mary, and leave her and her baby alone. May was dressed at last, and was at the school-room fire before the bell rang for dinner; but Ada was obliged to come to the dining-room without taking time

to change her damp dress,—and even then was late, and only saved from punishment by Mrs. Martyn's intercession with Miss Maria.

It was almost impossible that the exposure to the storm and the chill afterwards could fail to have bad effects on a child so delicate as Ada. She kept up bravely for a few days, saying she had only a cold like the others—why should she expect to get off better than her companions? But she was obliged to confess to Mary Carr that her cough hurt her, though she was very unwilling to allow she was ill—making light of it as long as possible, as her manner was with every trouble, and then giving way suddenly and completely at the last.

The stormy weather had closed in again after that one fine morning which had been so full of promise to Miss Martyn's girls. The next day the ground was white, and the wind came howling down the street, bringing with it sudden, gusty showers of snow. Spring was very far off again, they said to each other sadly, when the next day and the next were the same. It was a comfort to shut out the dreary prospect with the schoolroom shutters; but on the afternoon of this third day, things inside were dismal enough to Gerty, for Ada had come to her desk only to lay her head upon it, without even looking at the books which were lying around her. It was her time for preparing lessons, but, to Gerty's distress, she did not even try to do so; and her friend had to give her up in despair at last, and get through her work alone, while Ada sat beside her more quietly than she had ever seen her. At the table May Allardyce deliberately tore leaf after leaf out of her grammar without attracting attention, while the other children squabbled and played by turns; for Miss Framm, whose office it was to sit in the schoolroom that afternoon,

had been summoned away by a visitor, and they were all left to their own devices.

Perhaps Gerty was the only one who had really finished her lessons when Mademoiselle entered the room, looking weary and much worried. Twice a week she gave a lesson in French history to the elder girls, who were as unruly pupils as could well be, refusing to prepare their lesson unless it suited them to do so, and talking and laughing during the class without the slightest respect to their teacher. Their behaviour was all the more provoking to Mademoiselle, as the young ladies were not only respectful and attentive to their masters, but Miss Framm somehow managed to keep them in order, and make her lessons interesting. Of course the poor little governess might have appealed to Miss Maria, but even prudence was against that course; for her comfort was very much dependent on these elder girls, who were very pleasant companions out of school-hours in the meantime, but were quite able to make themselves disagreeable if they chose. There was nothing for it but to endure the misery of these hours as well as she could; but perhaps it was scarcely to be wondered at that she was tempted to pour forth upon the children the wrath which she dared not show to their elders, and Gerty and her companions had learned to dread the lessons they received immediately after Mademoiselle had been teaching the elder girls. She appeared rather earlier than usual this evening; and it was certainly not soothing to her temper to find the schoolroom in disorder, the children for the most part at play, and May Allardyce quietly consigning the remains of her book to the bottom of the waste-paper basket. To the delight of Gerty, she made a sudden pounce on May, boxed her ears soundly, and taking possession of the unfortunate grammar to show

to Miss Maria, she turned the owner of it out of the room by the shoulders, almost before she had time to set up a howl. Her class assembled quickly enough after that, most of them feeling rather uneasy in their minds about their own unprepared lessons. Ada was the last to come to the table, and as her governess seated herself, she said wearily,—

“I’m very sorry, Mademoiselle, but I haven’t done my lessons. I was so tired, I couldn’t learn them.”

It was an unfortunate speech, for Nettie Cathcart had given the same excuse an hour before. She had meant to be impudent, and Mademoiselle knew it, yet she had been obliged to bear the insult quietly. But that very fact made her furious now.

“You dare to tell me you have not learned your lessons! You dare to speak English to me! Return to your desk this moment, Mademoiselle Ada, and finish your studies.”

Ada rose without a word and carried her books away; but though she obeyed Mademoiselle so far as to open them, she put her head down again in the old position, her hair falling over her face and the open pages beside her.

Mademoiselle took no more notice of her, but went on with her class, getting more and more irritated as one girl after another failed in her lesson. Things had been going on very badly for some time, when the discomfort of the children was brought to a climax by the entrance of Miss Maria. She came in without any intention of interrupting the class,—merely to take a book from one of the desks,—but Mademoiselle’s angry manner and Ada’s bent head attracted her attention immediately. She looked round the whole party in her usual keen way before she spoke to the governess.

“Miss Godfrey is in disgrace, Mademoiselle?”

"It is true. She has not prepared her lesson," said Mademoiselle, rather grimly.

But Gerty could bear it no longer. With a firm determination to save Ada from trouble or share it with her, she seized Miss Maria's dress, and compelled that dreadful lady to turn round and listen to her.

"Miss Maria, it's not her fault! She isn't well; she coughed all night, and couldn't sleep. *Please* let Ada off this time, and I'll learn her lines!"

"Do you really think I'll let you do that for me!" said Ada, looking up for the first time when Gerty spoke.

"You'll have to, if Miss Maria does."

Was ever such conduct seen before at Miss Martyn's school! The other girls were perfectly aghast at Gerty's temerity, as she still kept hold of Miss Maria's dress, and looked up with an eager face for her answer to the singular offer she had made.

"Ada will not be punished if she is ill and unable to do her lessons," said Miss Maria gravely. "Mademoiselle, you will kindly excuse her to-night, and she may go to bed if she wishes."

The frightened faces round the table became triumphant, as the girls felt they had gained a case against their governess. But Miss Maria was a wise woman, and had not the least intention of establishing a dangerous precedent, and undermining Mademoiselle's authority. She had found the book she wanted, and was leaving the room, when something made her stop to ask if Miss Stuart was prepared for her class. She was the only one who was, Mademoiselle was obliged to acknowledge. "Then the other children will write out all their lesson and bring it to me in the evening," said Miss Maria, spreading sudden dismay as she departed.

Ada had risen after Miss Maria spoke, but instead of tossing her books away carelessly, as she generally did, she stopped, and slowly, with weary little fingers, arranged the contents of her desk in order. Miss Maria had been kind, and she tried to be unusually tidy from a feeling of gratitude to her; but weeks after, Gerty remembered the action and how it was done. All the girls in the class sat in dead silence while Mademoiselle gave a dictation lesson, so Ada could not speak before she went away. But as she passed Gerty's seat, she stopped for an instant and put her lips to her hair, then went quietly out of the schoolroom.

Lessons went on longer than usual that night, for after tea there was a lecture on astronomy, and it was pretty late in the evening before the girls were free. They were all rather tired when the master went away at last, and some of them, especially the children who had still their task to write, decidedly cross. It was very hard that, after sitting quiet so long under a lecture that was not in the least interesting to them, they had to finish their evening by copying out several pages of a French story. And there was no sympathy to be got from any one. Mademoiselle sat silent, and worked at her tatting as if she cared for nothing else in the world; and as for the elder girls, they were inclined to be amused. Nettie Cathcart was even hard-hearted enough to do a little teasing. "What! all these children got punishment lessons! Mademoiselle, I admire you."

Mademoiselle shut her mouth tighter than ever, and did not look up. But Molly Smith made answer, whispering,—
"It isn't Mademoiselle; it's Miss Maria!"

"In that case, dear little girl, I would advise you to write it neatly."

"I would like to see *you* with a punishment lesson,

Miss Cathcart! better than almost anything," said Ellen Murray, driving her pen to the very bottom of the ink-bottle in impotent fury.

"I dare say you would," said Nettie, with some complacency. "Your wish is a very natural one, but not at all likely to be gratified, as far as I can see. Mademoiselle prefers to employ a scapegoat to suffer for my sins. I'm not sure that it's a fair way, though."

"I'm not sure of it either, Nettie," said Kate M'Kenzie emphatically. She meant to turn the point of Nettie's remark against herself, and if Mademoiselle had shown any disposition to take up arms on her own behalf, Kate would have sided with her. But Mademoiselle maintained an obstinate silence.

"How nice it is that you and I agree for once, Kate! But, Mademoiselle, if you *will* visit my iniquity on somebody else's head, I would rather it was not poor little Ada's. She gets into trouble enough on her own account to satisfy most people. Besides, I've a fancy for the child; and next time you try the plan, Mademoiselle, perhaps you will kindly choose some other small girl."

"Oh! you needn't be sorry for Ada," said Janie Leslie; "*she's* all right—it's only poor us. But we had the grandest scene—I never saw anything like it in my life! Miss Maria came in, you know—"

"Hold your tongue. How can any one write while you're jabbering! Gerty Stuart made a fool of herself; that was all the grand scene."

"You're a nice little girl," said Nettie, regarding Ellen Murray with interest; "a gentle, ladylike little girl! Next time Mademoiselle wants to pour out her wrath on some one, I think she might do well to choose you. I give her free leave."

Mademoiselle's silence was very remarkable, and the elder girls were afraid that Nettie Cathcart had gone too far. But nothing would persuade her to leave the subject till she had heard the whole story of Mademoiselle's anger with Ada, and Miss Maria's visit to the schoolroom. Gerty had taken no part in the conversation at all; and she went away now just as Janie began her story, leaving her companions to comment as they chose upon her share in the afternoon's adventures.

All the way through the passages and upstairs she ran as fast as she could, but coming to the bedroom door she stopped a minute, then turned the handle softly lest Ada should be asleep. But when Gerty entered she was startled to find no one in the room but the housemaid, who was arranging the beds for the night. "O Jane! do you know where Ada is?"

"Miss Godfrey is upstairs in the sickroom. Mrs. Martyn thought she would be quieter and more comfortable there for a day or two."

Gerty made no answer. She went to one of the dressing-tables, and stood leaning against it, with her face turned away from Jane.

"Miss Stuart, I see your scarf and one of your gloves lying on your bed. You had better put them away before I come, or I must take them to Miss Maria."

Gerty apparently gave no heed at first, but after a minute she took up her things and tossed them carelessly into a drawer. Jane, going on with her work, remembered other occasions when her timely warnings had saved Ada from a fine, and her kindness had been received with lively gratitude. She had come to a very unfavourable conclusion about Miss Stuart's manners before the room was put in order, and she was ready to go. But the door was not

shut behind her when Gerty exclaimed, as if a thought had struck her, "Oh, stop a minute, please!"

Jane complied, but not very willingly.

"Do you think you could take these flowers to Ada? They're hers; and she'll be sure to want them, if she has to stay up there for days."

Something in the tone of Gerty's voice completely softened the kind-hearted housemaid, and she readily undertook the charge of the glass with Ada's beloved Christmas roses.

"I'll give them to Miss Ada to-night, and I'll tell her you sent them," she promised, as she went away.

CHAPTER XIX.

MEETING AGAIN.



AFTER that, there came a dreary time for poor Gerty. Masters came and went, lessons were learned, walks were taken, and all the affairs of the school went on as usual; but Ada's place was empty. She was better, Mrs. Martyn always told the girls, in answer to their eager inquiries; but the doctor was anxious about her cough, and said she needed the greatest care. So Ada was still shut up in the sickroom, where none of her companions were allowed to enter; and Gerty downstairs learned her lessons alone, and was very silent during play-hours, missing her little friend night and day. At first, some of the elder girls made efforts to cheer her; but if Gerty could not have Ada, she wanted no one else: so their advances were so ungraciously received, that they drew back somewhat offended. Even Mary Carr lost patience with her in those days; and so it came to pass that Gerty got what she asked for, and was let alone.

One Sunday afternoon, the second after Ada went away, Gerty had come into the drawing-room after church, and found a retired corner for herself almost out of sight. She was seated on the floor behind one of the couches, her Bible open in her lap, trying to read over the verses she had to repeat for her Sunday evening lesson. This was the time when she and Ada used to go off together for a talk; and

in spite of the rule which forbade the girls leaving the drawing-room on Sunday afternoons, they had generally managed to get far enough away from the others to make their conversation private. But to-day it seemed to Gerty as if she could not shut her ears to the Babel of tongues around her.

Kate M'Kenzie and Mary Carr were on the hearth-rug chattering with Mademoiselle, who had long ago been coaxed and cajoled back into good-humour; while the other girls, scattered in groups about the large room, laughed, and quarrelled, and played as they felt disposed. There were only two among them all who were really reading,—Emily Gordon, who was seated in a corner with her hymn-book; and Nettie Cathcart, comfortably established in an arm-chair, busy with an innocent-looking book in a brown paper cover, which had been a red and yellow novel the day before.

"Oh, here's Gerty!" said May Allardyce, crawling round the end of the couch on her hands and knees. "What are you crying about, Gerty?"

"Go away!" said Gerty gruffly.

"I don't know what to do," whimpered May. "I don't like Sunday at all. I wish you'd tell me a story."

But Gerty had been too much disgusted with May's indifference to Ada's absence to be inclined to take any trouble with her now. "I don't remember any stories. Go away," she repeated again; and the child obeyed.

Gerty heard Ellen Murray call her immediately.

"Come here, May, and I'll show you something funny. You needn't go to Gerty; she's as grumpy as possible. No one can get a civil word from her, now Ada's away—as if things weren't dull enough for every one as well as her!"

At the other end of the room Nettie Cathcart was saying,—“I think this is by a long way the best of hers I have ever read. I’m half done with the book now, and I don’t see through the plot a bit!”

“I neither read Miss Braddon’s works nor discuss them on Sundays,” was Miss M’Kenzie’s reply.

“Every one to their taste, Catherine. If you and Mary prefer to talk over the fashions with Mademoiselle, it’s all the same to me.”

“Well, it wasn’t right of us to be talking about bonnets; there’s no doubt about it. You were in a glass-house, Kate, and shouldn’t have been throwing stones; but, all the same, you ought to be ashamed of reading novels on Sundays, Nettie.”

“My dear girls, when *will* you learn that your preaching has not the least effect on me?”

“I’m sure this is the only time we have for rest,” said Maggie Murray in her lazy drawl. “Miss Maria leads us a dog’s life on Sundays; twice to church, and then Bible-classes, sermon-reading, and singing hymns all evening, till I’m far more sleepy than on other days.”

Maggie Murray’s younger sister was on the floor a little way off, playing quiet games with May Allardyce and one or two other children.

“Now, then, each take a corner of the handkerchief; and when I say, ‘Hold fast!’ then you must let go; and when I say, ‘Let go!’ then hold fast. Now, we’re going to begin.”

So the Sunday afternoon passed on at Miss Martyn’s school. And Gerty gave up trying to read her Bible in despair, and sat quiet in her corner, letting great tears fall unnoticed on the open pages in her lap.

Tea-time was still a long way off, when Mrs. Martyn

looked in at the door. The younger girls made a general scamper to the table, to gain possession of some of those volumes of sermons and religious magazines which had been placed there regularly every Sunday since Gerty came to school. They had been familiar to them all for a long time, and were never touched now except when Mrs. Martyn or her daughter appeared. On this occasion, however, the girls made their move rather too late, and Mrs. Martyn had been quite able to see the state of things.

"O for shame! for shame!" said she, shaking her head gravely at the girls. "I think you're all forgetting what day it is. You must sit quiet now and read till tea-time. I'm sure there are plenty of nice books here."

"Very nice books, Mrs Martyn," said Miss Catheart, in a tone the good old lady could not understand. She had an instinctive suspicion of Nettie and her doings; but she had never found her out in any mischief, and this afternoon she had certainly been reading in a most exemplary manner. The idea of making any investigation as to the character of the work she was perusing so diligently never entered Mrs. Martyn's head, but she felt rather uncomfortable nevertheless; and, the children being all seated quietly by this time, she hastened to execute her errand and take her departure. "Where's Gerty Stuart? Isn't she here?"

"Yes, I'm here," said Gerty, rising and coming slowly out of her hiding-place.

"I want to speak to you for a minute, my dear," said Mrs. Martyn; and Gerty willingly followed her out of the room. "Ada has been asking to see you so often!" said Mother Hubbard, when the door was closed. "I don't like to see her sitting so sad and quiet upstairs. Now, it would never do to have you and all the others running in

to her whenever you liked, and Miss Maria thinks she ought to be kept very quiet. But you're a quiet little girl, my dear; and if you promise not to let her talk much to bring on her cough, I think you might go and sit with her for a little while."

Gerty's face had got very bright when she began to guess what the end of Mrs. Martyn's speech was to be.

"Just now, Mrs. Martyn?" she said impatiently.

"Yes, my dear. But, Gerty, remember you must be quiet," added Mrs. Martyn in some alarm, as Gerty broke away from her and rushed upstairs. "After all, we've not done much good by keeping her away from them," she said to herself with a sigh, immediately afterwards.

The sickroom was in a higher story than the pleasant chamber where the two little friends had spent so many happy hours; but it too was large and light, and the windows looked out on the gardens instead of the noisy street. Gerty had never been there before, and it struck her as being very silent and empty after the crowded drawing-room she had left. Ada was sitting all alone in an arm-chair drawn close to the fire; beside her, on a little table, was the glass with the Christmas roses. She looked up quickly when the door opened, but did not rise; and when Gerty came up and kissed her, Mrs. Martyn would have been surprised and relieved could she have seen how quietly the little girls greeted each other. Then Gerty sat down on a stool at Ada's feet; and both children were silent for a minute, holding each other's hands.

"You're better—aren't you, Ada?" said Gerty at last, bethinking herself that some such inquiry was necessary.

Ada did not appear so ill as she had expected; but it struck her that she was strangely pretty, with a bright, far-away look in her eyes which Gerty had never seen

before. But Ada answered gaily, and the familiar tones put Gerty at her ease again,—

“Oh, I’m much better—nearly well! And I’ll be quite better now you have come.”

“Your Christmas roses are withered now,” said Gerty, feeling as if she was scarcely able to talk of the weary time of her separation from Ada.

“I’m so sorry,” said Ada, touching the faded flowers lovingly with the tips of her slender fingers. “I took such care of them, and Jane gave them fresh water every day; but I suppose this warm room isn’t good for them, for they began to wither very soon.”

“Never mind, Ada; you know it’s a long time since you got them. And you’ll have some snowdrops from Burnside. I’ll write mamma to send you some, for our snowdrops are beauties.”

Ada was probably not astonished to hear of the particular loveliness of the Burnside flowers, for she had already learned that everything there was excellent of its kind. But Gerty stopped her when she was going to speak.

“No, you mustn’t thank me now, for Mother Hubbard said I wasn’t to let you talk much. It’s me that’s to talk to you, and you’re to be quiet.”

“You’ll say a great deal then, Gerty—won’t you? Just think that we’ve had no talk for nearly a fortnight!”

“I’ve wanted to talk to you so much. O Ada, I’ve missed you so horribly! I’ve missed you at breakfast-time, and school-time, and walk-time; there’s no use of going over all the times, for I *always* missed you! And the evening worst of all, for your bed was empty, and there was no one to talk to. Mary had always a book, or went to see Miss M’Kenzie. It wasn’t her blame, though; I was cross, and wouldn’t speak to her.”

Gerty was very nearly crying, and Ada, stroking her hand, would fain have made her talk of something else. But when Gerty began to get confidential and penitent, she always did it most thoroughly, and it was impossible to stop her now.

"Everything's been going wrong since you went away, Ada! And I've been getting so awfully wicked! I haven't read once with Mary—I couldn't bear it without you; so I just went through a verse or two anywhere, as fast as I could, and got into bed before she was ready, and put my head under the clothes. And I've been in such an ill humour all the time with them all; and Emily Gordon was a bother. Do you know, I was sitting in the drawing-room when Mother Hubbard came, behind the sofa, and I was just *hating* every one of them. O Ada, you must be quick and get well, and come downstairs again, for I can't be good without you!"

Ada might have said to her with some truth that her trials during the last fortnight had been harder to bear than Gerty's. She could have told of dreary days and restless nights, of the weariness which never left her, and the cough that kept her from sleeping. She might have reminded Gerty that Mrs. Martyn was not a very entertaining companion—or, at least, that her society was apt to get tiresome, when it was only varied by visits from the doctor or Miss Maria. All this, and much more, Ada might have told Gerty; but self-consciousness was not one of her faults. In her sympathy with her friend, her own feelings were forgotten, and she only remembered her troubles in bringing Gerty the comfort which had come to her when she needed it.

"Dear Gerty! I can't help you, but the Lord Jesus can. And being ill, or going away to another country, or

anything else in the world, can never take us away from him."

With the earnest words of her little friend there came to Gerty a new sense of the love that is stronger than all earthly love. Ada and she were away from their parents, and they had been separated from each other; but alike in the noisy schoolroom and the quiet sick-chamber they could ever be near the Saviour. And Gerty began to think that, if the Lord was near to help her, it might even be possible to gather up her courage, and try to work and wait patiently, though Ada had to stay upstairs for a while.

"If I could only remember it!" she said, with a sigh. "But I forget; and it doesn't seem real, and then I just go on any way. That's what I've been doing all the time you've been here. But I'll try; and you'll get better, and come back and help me as you used to do."

"But, Gerty, how could I possibly have helped you?"

"But you did, though," persisted Gerty stoutly. "You put things into my head, and you helped me to do things."

"Yes," said Ada, with a curious mixture of sadness and playfulness in her voice, "I remember now, I helped you to do some things. I put it into your head to look for Emily's diary long ago, and I showed you how to post letters without Miss Maria knowing, and how to practise with one hand and read a story-book with the other, and ever so much more—"

"That was last year."

"Well, but this year we dressed up and went out visiting after bed-time, and played 'tig' round the schoolroom table ever so often; and we used to hide in the curtain at Mr. Wilson's class. Oh! and do you remember the great big picture of Miss Maria we made on the black-board?"

"Are you about done?" asked Gerty with awful severity.

"Not nearly done!" said Ada, fairly laughing now; "at least, not really—but there's no use in going over it all. We got punishments for all these things, Gerty; and it was I that made you do them, every one! I don't think you would ever even have got *lines*, if it hadn't been for me. Why, Gerty, the very last thing that I did before I was ill was to get you into trouble because of me."

"Well, anything more?"

"Yes; I'm sorry, very sorry. I try to keep out of mischief, but I get into it before I've time to think. I must try to try harder when I go downstairs again; but there are so *many* lessons and so *many* rules!"

Ada had grown grave again, and her eyes were shining through tears. All the time she had been speaking Gerty sat on the stool gazing into the fire; but now she turned round to look up at Ada, and lay her other hand on hers,—
"Ada, you must never say such things to me again; because the truth is this—that if ever I go to heaven, it will be all because of you! I know that it's only God can make people good, and so it must have been him that gave me you to help me!"

Gerty put both her arms round Ada, and drawing her face down to hers, held her fast for a while without speaking. And Ada, startled by Gerty's earnestness, was silent too, till Gerty raised herself to brush away her tears suddenly, saying remorsefully,—
"There now, that's just like me! I've been letting you talk ever so much, and get excited, and make yourself worse again."

Ada had some difficulty in soothing Gerty's fears, but she managed it at last. Then discovering that the arm-chair was big enough for both, she persuaded Gerty to come beside her and let her put her head on her shoulder. And sitting together in the warm firelight, she drew Gerty on

to talk of the schoolroom-life she had left as it seemed so long ago, asking very eagerly what had happened since she was ill; for Miss Martyn's house was home as well as school to Ada, and the girls her dearest friends.

Meanwhile Mrs. Martyn was indulging in a quiet nap in her own room, and was oblivious for a time of her little patient in the sickroom and the noisy company of girls downstairs. Time passed on, while Gerty and Ada chatted contentedly over the fire, and afternoon had turned into evening before the old lady bethought herself of coming to separate the little friends.

In the drawing-room things had been going on much the same way all afternoon. The books had been almost all thrown away again immediately after Mrs. Martyn left; and Mademoiselle, whose ideas of Sabbath-keeping were anything but strict, allowed her charges to do as they liked, provided they did not get intolerably noisy, or threaten to bring her into trouble. Nettie Cathcart had nearly finished her novel, the children under Ellen Murray's guidance had passed from "cross purposes" to "cat's cradle," subjects of conversation were dying out, and the whole party were waiting rather impatiently for the summons to tea, when Gerty came back to the drawing-room. Her long absence had not passed unnoticed, but no one had remarked on it much, for she had never shown any disposition to join in the Sunday afternoon diversions of her companions, and generally tried to escape from them altogether. And now, when she reappeared, it was the elder girls who first showed any interest in her proceedings,—beginning with a rebuke from Miss M'Kenzie. "Don't you know that you are breaking rules, when you stay in your own room on Sunday afternoons?"

"It's a choice between breaking rules and breaking the Sabbath," said Mary Carr, eagerly taking Gerty's part.

"How can we read or do anything, all shut up here together? I believe Miss Maria thinks she keeps us out of mischief, when she makes us stay here with Mademoiselle; but she never was more mistaken in her life; and if Gerty is so anxious for quiet that she goes and sits in a cold room, it's a great deal to her credit,—that's all."

"But, Mary, I wasn't in a cold room. I was in a very warm room, for I was upstairs with Ada." Gerty made this announcement with considerable pride. She was greatly pleased that her particular friendship with Ada had been recognized by Mrs. Martyn's choosing her to be the first to visit her, and she had no doubt of the effect the news would produce on her companions. And, indeed, Gerty became immediately the heroine of the evening. All the girls crowded round her, and in the midst of an eager circle of questioners she was obliged to give the most minute details of Ada's dress, appearance, and circumstances at the present time, as well as all the information she had been able to gain about how things had gone with her since they had seen her last.

"What does she do with herself all day?" "Does she look thin?" "Has she on her serge dress?" "Does she have to endure much Miss Maria?" Gerty was fairly pelted with questions. She did her best to reply; but to the most eager of all their inquiries she could give no satisfactory answer,—she did not know when Ada would be able to come among them again.

"Not for a while, I'm afraid. But she gave me a great many kisses and messages for you. I'm afraid I won't be able to remember them all."


"Deliver what you do remember, then, as fast as possible."

"Well, first and foremost, to begin with Mary"—and

Gerty began to hug her patroness with a violence that made the other girls warn her that if she began with strangulation, no one else would be inclined to let her execute Ada's commissions. The other embraces were gone through more rapidly, but though the tea-bell rang in the middle of her operations, Gerty was determined that none of them should be put off till afterwards. Most of the girls had left the room, but Ellen Murray still lingered, to gather up the odds and ends of string and paper she had been using in her games, when Gerty came to her and said rather awkwardly, "I've got a kiss for you—will you take it?" Astonished, but by no means ill-pleased, Ellen submitted, then took Gerty's arm, and went with her to the dining-room—the two children walking together for the first time.

CHAPTER XX.

VERY CLOSE TOGETHER.

ERTY did not find very much difficulty in persuading Mrs. Martyn to allow her to visit Ada again next day; and before the week was over, she had succeeded in establishing a custom of going to the sickroom every evening after lessons and tea were over. The others were rather inclined to be jealous of her privileges; but Gerty's character as a "quiet little girl" stood high with Mrs. Martyn, and so at first she was the only one of Ada's schoolfellows who was allowed to be with her. But, in spite of her enjoyment, in this state of affairs, Gerty could not help feeling that she held her liberties very insecurely. She had more than a suspicion that Mrs. Martyn, out of compassion for Ada's loneliness, had introduced Gerty into the sickroom without the consent or even the knowledge of her daughter; and all the time she spent with her friend she was in trepidation lest Miss Maria should appear, and pronounce sentence of banishment upon her.

And one wet forenoon, when she had gone upstairs to stay with Ada during the usual hour for walking, it seemed, indeed, as if Gerty's fears were realized. For, as the two little girls were contentedly painting pictures at the table, there entered an elderly gentleman with grizzled hair, whom Ada immediately greeted as the doctor, and behind him, close on his very footsteps, Miss Maria herself. Both figures

were awful enough to Gerty, but Miss Maria said nothing at all at first, and Ada seemed on such friendly and familiar terms with the doctor, that she was somewhat reassured about him.

"This is my friend, Gerty Stuart," said Ada, introducing her, as the old gentleman seated himself on a chair beside his patient.

Gerty would rather not have been brought into notice just then, having some vague ideas that it might still be possible to escape Miss Maria's eyes. Now, when that hope was gone, she stood behind Ada's chair not knowing what to do, but conscious that the awful gaze of her governess was fixed upon her; while the doctor only gave her a glance from under his shaggy eyebrows.

"What sort of a nurse does she make?"

"A very, very good one, doctor," said Ada, immediately.

"Does she? I'm glad to hear it, Miss Ada; and I suppose we must believe it, for you're looking better."

Gerty ventured to raise her eyes now, and meeting Miss Maria's, got her dismissal by a look. She went away, uncertain if she might be allowed to return; but the doctor's words had given her some hope, and though anxious, she was not despairing.

And, indeed, the doctor's orders about Ada, as far as they were communicated to the girls, were by no means unsatisfactory. It is true that she was still to be confined to the warm room upstairs, but as far as possible she was to be amused and kept in good spirits, and so, if she wished it, her companions were to be with her there. In the afternoon, Gerty, meeting Miss Maria in the passage, was excessively astonished when she stopped and told her she might spend all her leisure time with Ada, if she cared to do so.

"I think I may trust you not to neglect your lessons even for your friend," said Miss Maria, leaving Gerty bewildered by her gracious words.

She was, however, the only girl who got free leave to go to the sickroom whenever she chose. The others had to go through the ceremony of asking Mrs. Martyn's permission; for it was not safe to run the risk of Ada's having too many visitors at once, and the girls were almost all anxious to be with her. Emily Gordon used to put off her practising till evening, that she might sit with her for a while during school-hours; and after tea, when Gerty was always with her, one or other of the girls would come to stay for a little. Sometimes it was one of the younger ones; but, with the exception of Gerty, Mrs. Martyn had not much faith in the quietness and discretion of Ada's contemporaries, and tried to keep them away from her as much as possible. But the elder girls came; and though Mary Carr was always most welcome, yet upstairs, in the sickroom, even Maggie Murray was gentle, while Kate M'Kenzie did her best to make amusing small talk for Ada, and Nettie Cathcart showed unlooked-for capabilities of talking nonsense without any venom in it. Miss Framm would come too, and sometimes Mademoiselle, but not so often as Gerty would have expected.

"We are friends, are we not?" she had said to Ada the first time she saw her during her illness.

"Oh yes!" said the child; "but, Mademoiselle, do you know, I really was tired and couldn't do my lessons that day."

Mademoiselle took the pretty head between her hands, and kissed Ada on both cheeks, French fashion.

"I believe it, my child," said she, kindly. But Mrs. Martyn came in just then; and though Mademoiselle came

again, she did not come often, and seldom stayed longer than a few minutes,—seeming not to care to talk to Ada. Gerty was rather puzzled by her conduct, but she could not impute it to indifference, so she kept all her indignation on that score for May Allardyce, who certainly cared very little for Ada's illness. The short time she had been away seemed to have blotted out all remembrance of her kindness from May's mind, and after the very first she scarcely ever mentioned her name. And while the strength of their love for Ada drew Gerty nearer to her other schoolfellows than she had ever been before, she grew to dislike May more and more, and scarcely ever spoke to her. It was only in consideration for Ada, that Gerty was sorry to have to tell her that her baby was getting on very badly, constantly in disgrace with the teachers, and generally quarrelling with the girls; but though Ada asked a great deal about May, she never made any remark on the information she obtained. And, rather to Gerty's astonishment, weeks passed before Ada asked to see her. Perhaps she had hoped that May would come of her own accord, but she never did; and at last, one Saturday afternoon Ada began to speak of her suddenly.

Gerty had come upstairs with her hands full of things for Ada—story-books which the girls had got from home for her to read, and little gifts they had managed to purchase when they were out with their friends in the morning. Ada was better than usual that day, and had been sitting up at the table arranging a bouquet of hot-house flowers which had come all the way from Laverock Hall for her, but after she had finished she lay down on the sofa and was unusually silent for a while.

“Shall I read to you?” asked Gerty, putting away a series of Nettie Cathcart's ridiculous pictures, which she

had been examining with great amusement, and turning her attention to "The Wide, Wide World," lying on the table beside them. "Ellen Murray left this on the drawing-room table last night," she went on, as Ada did not answer immediately, "and Miss Maria nabbed it, and was going to carry it off, and give her lines for having story-books when it wasn't Saturday. But Ellen told her it was going up to you; so she gave it back again, and let her off. I didn't think she would have done it, but I never saw Ellen so nearly crying. And it would have been such a pity, for it's such a nice book!"

Gerty turned over the leaves fondly, quite looking forward to the treat of reading it aloud to Ada, for both little girls were rather too fond of stories. But Ada stopped her by asking abruptly,—

"Is May at school this afternoon, Gerty?"

Oddly enough, Gerty had been thinking of May only a minute before, and she could not help wondering if it was the same connection of ideas that had brought her to Ada's mind.

"Yes; Mrs. Allardyce brought her back in the carriage just before I came to you."

"I would like to see her, Gerty. I think Mother Hubbard will be in the dining-room just now—will you ask her, and then bring May to me if she will come?"

Gerty determined she would make May come, but she did not say that to Ada. However, contrary to her expectations, May made no particular objection; though that might have been owing to the fact that she had been making explorations in Miss Murray's work-box, and thought it well to leave the schoolroom before that young lady discovered the disorder she had made.

But at the door of the sickroom she hesitated, and

seemed almost afraid to enter. The truth was, that Gerty had no idea of the barrier which the few weeks of separation had made between the child and Ada. May was not accustomed to illness, and she had heard that Ada was very ill; so it was with a feeling very like awe that she came slowly to the sofa, and gave her hand to her. Gerty had pledged herself to Mrs. Martyn that May should not talk too much; but as Ada tried in vain to interest her visitor in the pictures on the table, she thought with some bitterness how needless her promise had been.

Perhaps Ada understood May's feelings better, and that was why she made no allusion to herself or the length of time that had passed since she had seen her baby, only chattered on about the figures she and Gerty had been making.

"This is Lionel, May, with a blue frock and long yellow curls. It was Gerty invented that way of writing his name on his back. Isn't he a very nice-looking boy?"

May assented, scarcely bestowing a glance on the paper-doll brought out for her inspection. But her eyes, which had been wandering all round the unfamiliar apartment, came back to Ada, and rested on her with less uneasiness in their gaze. Ada talked exactly as she used to do, and even in appearance she was very little changed, May was thinking. Her very dress was the same violet serge she had worn in the schoolroom; and the excitement caused by her unwonted visitor had brought a flush to her cheeks, which certainly made her look much less delicate than she had done for months before her illness.

"Are you very ill, Ada?" said May at last.

"Oh no! I'll be quite better when the warm weather comes."

It was very stupid of them to tell me you were ill,"

said May, rather viciously. "When are you coming down stairs again, Ada?"

It occurred to Gerty, as she turned round at this last question, that as far as May was concerned there was need for Ada downstairs again. Seen against the light, May's hair looked tangled and rough, and her whole aspect was certainly very untidy. Gerty wondered if Ada noticed it too, and hoped she did not; while May's question remained unanswered for a minute, and was repeated again fretfully—"When are you coming downstairs again, Ada?"

"Just as soon as ever the doctor allows me. I don't like staying up here, May," said Ada, wistfully. "I'm very lonely sometimes."

"When you come back, you must tell me a great many stories. I want to hear about that man Christian, and what he did when he got away from the giant. He got up to some mountains, I know; and then, when you got as far as that, you were ill, and I couldn't hear any more."

May spoke in an aggrieved tone, exactly as if Ada's illness had been a special injury to her, and it was impossible for the other two to keep from laughing.

"What did he see on the mountains, Ada?"

"He saw a great many things, dear. And the shepherds took him up to a high peak, and he got a glimpse, through a glass, of the Celestial City."

"You might tell me a bit of it just now, Ada!"

Ada would have tried to do almost anything then to please May, and regain her influence over her. But the continuous speaking brought on her wearisome cough; and after being interrupted by it several times, she fairly broke down, and turning away from May, hid her face in the pillows.

"I can't do it, May!—I can't do it!"

There was a pause for a few minutes, and then May asked, "May I go away, then?"

No one answered her; so she slipped off her chair, and was going out of the door, when Ada looked up and called her.

"You are going away without kissing me!"

May came back to the sofa, and Ada raised herself, and put her arms round her. For a minute she held her close—so close, that May was half-frightened; then suddenly unclasping her hands, she let her go without a word.

Gerty could not trust herself to speak at first, she was so angry with May, so vexed and distressed for Ada. She was prudent enough to see that matters would only be made worse by her expressing her feelings; so, when Ada turned round after a little, and asked her to read, she brought the book, and sat down beside her without saying a word about May. All afternoon the little girls were busy with "The Wide, Wide World;" and when Mrs. Martyn came in, at tea-time, Ada was looking as bright as she generally did when Gerty was with her.

"We have both been very good. Gerty has been reading to me, and I've scarcely spoken a word for ever so long. Have you ever read 'The Wide, Wide World,' Mother Hubbard?"

Ada was a privileged person now, and used her nickname before Mrs. Martyn's face with the utmost coolness.

"No, my dear; I don't think I have. Is it a nice story?"

"It's a delightful story,—isn't it, Gerty? I would certainly advise you to read it, Mother Hubbard. Or will you wait till I'm better, and I'll read it aloud to you in the Easter holidays? You'll have plenty of time to sit and listen then, and you'll get on very fast with knitting your

bed-cover. I'm sure you want to get on with your bed-cover, Mother Hubbard?"

"O you chatterbox! what do you know about it?" said Mrs. Martyn good-naturedly.

"Know about your bed-cover! I know it very well, I assure you. Why, you were knitting a square of it when I first saw you, sitting in the drawing-room, when I came in with mamma. It has been going on ever since; but the strange thing is, Mother Hubbard, it never gets any nearer done."

"Ada, Ada! if Gerty can keep you quiet, it's more than I can," said Mrs. Martyn, rather sadly.

"I'll do it, Mrs. Martyn," said Gerty. "I'll come again in the evening and read, for that's the only thing that settles her."

Mrs. Martyn's bed-cover had long been a joke in the school, and Gerty was very much afraid about what Ada might say next. But while Gerty was speaking her mood changed, and the laughter died out of her eyes.

"Dear Mother Hubbard, you're very kind, and so is Gerty, only she mustn't come back again. I'll be very good without her, and I won't talk at all; you'll believe me when I promise, won't you? Gerty has been sitting with me all afternoon, and reading, so she mustn't come back to-night!"

"Mustn't she?" said Gerty, with calm irony in her tone.

"No, Gerty; you'll stay downstairs to please me. There will be a great deal of fun to-night, for it's 'stay-at-home Saturday,' and perhaps the girls will have a charade."

"Whatever they have, I'd a great deal rather be here."

"But, Gerty, I have been thinking this may go on a long time—my being ill, I mean. Some people are ill for months,

and years. Mother Hubbard, do you think that will be the way with me?"

Ada's question had certainly been a sudden one, but so most of her questions were; and Gerty could not understand why Mrs. Martyn seemed so much taken aback by this one. She rose and went to the window, making some change in the curtains, and turning her face away from the little girls before she answered, "No, my darling; I don't think it will be that with you."

Ada followed her with her eyes; and then, as if she too had noticed something strange in her manner, she was silent for a little, looking very thoughtful.

"Do you really like staying so much up here with me?" she asked at last, looking up at Gerty.

"Better than anything else."

"And Mother Hubbard says it won't be for long. I'm afraid I'm too selfish to send you away, Gerty."


May had undoubtedly been in Ada's thoughts, and her behaviour the reason why she tried to urge Gerty to keep away; but she made no allusion to her. And in the days that followed, though Ada was always pleased when the girls came to visit her, and eager to hear all schoolroom news, she never asked to see May—never spoke of her but once again.

Gerty used to wonder afterwards, when she thought how quietly, even pleasantly, the time went on for a while. Her companions were very kind to her then—it seemed as if Ada's illness had a softening effect on them all—but Gerty was often astonished by the peculiar gentleness shown to her, even by the girls whom she had been accustomed to consider her enemies. But, after all, she saw very little of them, for she used to get through her lessons as fast as possible, to hurry up to the sickroom, and spend her play-

hours over children's story-books, and quiet talks and games with Ada. Sometimes, when the two little girls were together, Miss Maria would come in; but her daily visit to Ada was generally made in the morning, and it never lasted long. Her relations with the child had never been friendly; and now, when she really wished to be kind and gentle, she seemed to feel her position very embarrassing, and find difficulty in knowing what to say. It was kind Mrs. Martyn who was sick-nurse during the day; and at night the elder girls took it by turns to sleep in Ada's room. They had petitioned Miss Maria to be allowed to do so, and with some difficulty gained her consent. No stranger was to nurse their pet; and even the mother whose remembrance Ada cherished so fondly, could scarcely have been more tender than the schoolgirls were to this lonely child left dependent on their love.

CHAPTER XXI.

THROUGH THE DARK VALLEY.

O the days slipped on till the morning of another Saturday, after Ada had been ill for several weeks. Gerty had finished her letter-writing as fast as possible, to go up to Ada early; but a visit from the doctor had obliged her to leave the sickroom again, and she had gone down to the schoolroom to watch at the window for his departure.

The large schoolroom was quite deserted when Gerty entered; for most of the girls had gone out to visit their friends, and the few that remained were scattered over the house, enjoying their Saturday's freedom in defiance of all rules. Gerty went and sat down at her desk, leaning her arm on it, and looking out, thinking rather lazily what a beautiful day it was, and wondering where they would go for a walk. Walks were not so pleasant as they had once been to Gerty; but surely the weather would soon be warm enough to make Ada well and strong, and able to come back to the schoolroom, and go out with her companions again. Then her thoughts wandered away to the heroine of the book she had been reading—Ellen Montgomery's trials were very interesting—and in her own holiday contentment she felt that she had only one thing to wish,—that the doctor would go, and let her and Ada return to their story.

But the luxury of being idle was too unusual for Gerty to become very impatient under it. It was so pleasant to sit doing nothing that she did not even feel inclined to talk, and she was decidedly annoyed when the sound of voices coming nearer in the passage made her think her loneliness was to be disturbed. She recognized the speakers as the two Murrays, who seemed deep in private conversation,—rather an unusual thing, for they were by no means affectionate sisters, or given to frequent each other's society much. Gerty had been on amicable terms with Ellen Murray of late, but nevertheless she had no particular wish for her company; and it was quite to her satisfaction when the two girls turned at the half-open schoolroom door, and paced slowly back along the passage. There was nothing unusual in their behaviour—Miss Martyn's girls were very fond of walking and talking in the passages, where they had better opportunities of being confidential than in any of the rooms; and if the Murrays were discussing family affairs, as was probable, their mode of doing so was not only natural but necessary in Gerty's eyes. Their conversation would probably be a long one; and Gerty was not so much afraid of being disturbed when they approached a second time, their voices mingling with the sound of the piano in the Blue Room, where Miss Framm was spending her Saturday forenoon with Beethoven. Gerty was not mistaken. Maggie and Ellen passed and went back without coming in; but just then the music came to a stop, and some of their words were distinctly audible.

• “The doctor told Mrs. Martyn that she was not to know—that taking away hope from her would be”—Maggie's next words were spoken so low that Gerty could not hear. “But Mary Carr thinks she has found out, only”—The voices died away again; the last Gerty could catch was an

allusion to some one whose name she did not hear—some one who was said rather emphatically not to have “the least idea of it.”

Gerty forgot that the Murrays did not know she was in the schoolroom,—forgot that she had no right to listen to what they were saying. She had overheard their words at first without any wish of her own; but now she waited in sickening anxiety till they should return again, and she might have another chance of finding out their meaning. Miss Framm was playing very softly—oh! when would they come? Surely they were walking very slowly. So they were, but not so slowly as Gerty fancied. She had made up her mind that they had gone away altogether, before her straining ears could hear the sound of Maggie Murray’s voice speaking low, but still continuously, as if she were repeating something to her sister. But before Gerty could distinguish the sense she had stopped, and the two girls were walking in silence when they came to the schoolroom door. There they seemed to make a pause, and Ellen asked, “Did Mrs. Martyn tell you,—are you sure, Maggie?—that the doctor said—just that?”

“There was very little hope almost from the first, I believe, but for a while he thought she might live through the summer. Mrs. Martyn says consumption is dreadfully in Major Godfrey’s family, so—” They did not turn back this time, but, pushing wide the door, came in and met Gerty face to face. Afterwards she remembered that both looked very sad, and Ellen was crying; even the dismayed looks they gave at each other when they saw her came back to her recollection, but at the time she was unconscious of it all. She rushed past them both, and upstairs to her room. All she felt was that she wanted to be alone; and mercifully it was empty.

She went down on the floor immediately, and lay with her face in her hands—not crying, only attempting to realize and understand what she had heard. *Ada was dying.* The doctor had little hope from the first, and now he had said she could not live through the summer. Another child in Gerty's place might have refused to believe it; she accepted the fact, only she could not understand it. She believed it, because the bitter truth could not be denied that Ada was much worse, that she was weaker and more restless than she used to be, and her cough was as incessant as ever. It was a sad confirmation of Maggie Murray's words to remember that when first she began to visit Ada in the sickroom, she had been able to sit up and play with her for hours, while of late a few minutes of it had seemed to exhaust her, and the drawing and painting had passed into Gerty's hands altogether. And while at one time Ada had made light of her illness, and talked constantly of being better, she had altogether given up doing so now, and had kept silent when Gerty talked of what was to be done when she was well again.

All this came back to Gerty, and she wondered why it was that she who loved Ada should have been blinded during these weeks when she had been so often with her: surely it was strange that she needed to overhear a casual conversation between her schoolfellows to tell her Ada was dying! But death was no real thing to Gerty; it had never come near her at all, for the happy home-circle at Burnside was unbroken. And now how could she realize that this little girl who had shared all her lessons and all her games—Ada, who had been closer than any one else in the perfect confidence of their childish friendship, was going away from her side into the invisible world? All Gerty's joys and sorrows during the past year had been mingled with Ada's—it was

impossible to imagine Miss Martyn's school without her ; she could not go without taking with her a great piece out of Gerty's life.

But even then, in her first bewilderment, Gerty tried hard to think not of her own loss, but of Ada's gain,—not what earth was to be for her, but what heaven was to be for Ada. She strove hard to fancy her little friend among the glories and the brightness of the heavenly city ; she pictured Ada dressed in glittering white, with a crown above the pretty hair that Gerty used to play with, and a palm in the little hand that had clasped hers so often. But it would not do. She could only think of her in the familiar rooms where she used to study and play, a lithe little figure in a short dress, with a quantity of hair which never would keep tidy. But it was most difficult of all to imagine how Ada would feel in the strange, far-off land where she was going all alone. Was it possible, Gerty wondered, that she could ever be at home there ? Would her walks on the golden streets be half so pleasant as those she used to take with Gerty on Saturday forenoons, in the days that had gone by for ever ? Could she love any of the bright angels as she had loved the girls at Miss Martyn's school ?

It was not till the bell rung to summon the girls to prepare for their walk that Mary Carr came to her room. Then Gerty rose and began slowly and mechanically to get her walking things, thinking it strange that everything should go on as usual and she herself give in to it. The girls had been together in silence for a few minutes, before Mary suddenly came up to Gerty, and putting her arms round her, tried to tell her how sorry she was for what had happened.

“My poor Gerty I would have given anything you had not heard it as you did. And Miss Murray is sorry—we

are all sorry for you, dear. Only, remember what it is for us as well as you—we all liked Ada! I remember her coming first to school—such a little thing—” Mary’s voice had not been steady all along, and now she fairly broke down; and Gerty, looking up at her with dry eyes, wondered why it was that she could not cry too. “But, Gerty dear, the grief is all for us. It will be so well with her; she will go to heaven—”

“Don’t, Mary!” said Gerty hoarsely. “Don’t, please! I know you are very good, but I can’t bear it.”

Mary’s last words had jarred painfully, bringing back the thoughts which had been in her mind before—thoughts which seemed to Gerty too wicked to tell any one. She escaped from her friend’s embrace, and hurriedly put on her hat and jacket, without speaking or even looking at her again. Her behaviour hurt Mary, but she pitied her too really to be angry for more than a minute, though she had no key to Gerty’s feelings. When the procession of girls filed out of Miss Martyn’s door these two walked together; but Miss Carr made no further efforts to comfort the child. Miss Maria was in charge that day, and they were sure of a long walk as well as an orderly one; but Gerty, going silently along the sunny streets, neither knew nor cared where she was taken to.

It was not till they had been out a long time, and Mary was beginning to complain of being tired, that Gerty was roused up to notice where she was going, and found herself in a quiet road among little suburban cottages.

“Look, dear, isn’t that garden delightfully spring-like?” Mary Carr had said, making a kindly attempt to interest her in something. And Gerty, raising her eyes, saw through a low railing a tiny plot all bright with flowers, and a little old lady coming out of the garden gate, who stopped and

looked at the schoolgirls curiously as they passed. She stood still to observe them all, and when Gerty came at last, walking with Mary Carr just before Miss Maria, there was something like disappointment in her eyes.

"Are you going to turn now?" said poor Gerty. "I—I'm tired!" And her friend, understanding her better this time, could only be sorry she had spoken.

"Yes—in a minute, I think; at the end of this street—*Dear Gerty!*"

The recollection of her last walk with Ada had been too much for her, and Gerty could not control herself. She knew that Mary Carr dexterously untwisted the veil from her own hat and put it over her face; then took hold of her hand, in spite of the rule that forbade it, and the fact that Miss Maria was directly behind. But how she got home through all these weary streets Gerty never knew.

Back in her own room at last, she flung herself on Ada's empty bed, and lay there sobbing and crying till her companions were frightened by the violence of her grief. One after another came to her during that long afternoon; but to all expressions of sympathy, and all attempts at comfort, Gerty turned a deaf ear. "Don't speak to me! oh, please go away, and don't speak to me!" she kept repeating; till at last they were obliged to see that leaving her alone was all they could do for her.

She had been all by herself a long time, when Mary Carr came in and found her with her face hidden in the pillows, lying so still that she thought she was asleep. Mary hesitated to speak at first; and it was not till she was satisfied by the sound of her breathing that she was awake that she said gently,—

"Gerty, Mrs. Martyn has sent to the schoolroom to know where you were, for Ada has been asking for you

several times. Do you think you are able to go to her now?"

Gerty made no answer; she was too stupified with crying to be able to speak or even think. But she rose, and let Mary put her hair and dress tidy, and try to wash away the stains of tears from her face. Then she went slowly upstairs in the afternoon sunlight, and coming to the door of the sickroom, she hesitated and was afraid to enter, as May Allardyce had once been. She did not know how she would meet Ada's questions about her absence. Gerty could scarcely believe it was only in the morning she had left her; but even if it was really so, her being away for several hours must seem strange to Ada, who was accustomed to have her the whole of Saturday. It was with a beating heart that Gerty opened the door at last and entered the familiar room.

Mrs. Martyn, seated at the fire, was too much occupied with some perplexity in her famous knitting to look up when she came in; but Ada raised her eyes immediately and fixed them full on Gerty's face for a minute, then dropped them again without speaking. And poor Gerty, conscious of her tear-blurred visage, could find nothing to say, and crept away to the window to be out of Ada's sight.

"Mother Hubbard," said Ada, breaking the silence, as Mrs. Martyn's difficulties seemed to be clearing away, "you have no idea what good care Gerty takes of me when you are gone. She's always wanting to give me jelly; and yesterday she poured out my cough mixture without spilling a drop."

"That was nice, dear," said Mother Hubbard, placidly knitting on.

"And so, dear Mother Hubbard," said Ada, seeing that

broader hints were necessary to accomplish her purpose, and proceeding to give them without the least hesitation—"so, dear Mother Hubbard, if you would like to go and see Miss Maria, you won't be afraid to leave me alone with her, will you?"

"Oh! I'm to go away, am I?" said the old lady, in perfect good humour. "Well, well! if Gerty is going to stay with you, I suppose you don't need me; and I've a letter to write to Miss Martyn. Have you got any message for her?"

"Only my love, and I'm glad she's better," said Ada, her face clouding over curiously at the mention of Miss Maria's elder sister, who had been her Aunt Laura's governess long ago, and was always the little girl's special friend in the Martyn family; "and tell her I'm very sorry she isn't coming home soon."

Mrs. Martyn folded up her knitting and went away, leaving Gerty for the first time sorry to be alone with her little friend. She stood still at the window, looking out on the garden with aching, weary eyes; and did not even turn round till Ada slipped off the couch and crossed the room to her. Gerty forgot that, being at present the nurse in charge, she ought to have made her patient lie down again. When Ada touched her, she turned and put her arm round her, and the two little girls stood side by side. And to Gerty it seemed all at once as if the sad afternoon had been only a horrible dream, from which she had wakened now to find herself back again in the old life with Ada. It cost her no effort to speak cheerfully, and even to smile, when she asked her how they would spend their time till Mrs. Martyn returned.

"My paint-box is up here, and Miss Cathcart made a beautiful point to my pencil. Shall we make some more

little boys and girls, or go back to Ellen Montgomery till tea-time?"

"No; I would like to talk. You know I don't have much of you except on Saturdays; and, O Gerty, you mustn't keep away, for it won't be very long now!"

Gerty was not sure what Ada meant, though the words struck her with a sense of pain. She made no answer, and Ada went on after a minute,—“Mother Hubbard doesn't make a very good pretender, Gerty, and neither do some of the girls; and so I've known for a long time what the doctor thinks about me. I shall never be better again.”

Ada spoke so quietly, that the very sound of her voice soothed the violence of Gerty's grief; and she spoke very softly when she asked, “My darling, *my* Ada! are you willing to go?”

“I think I am—at least generally,” said Ada; then her voice faltered. “But, oh! I'm so sorry to leave you all—so sorry to go without seeing papa and mamma again!”

“But we meant to go to heaven *together*, Ada, and we've only gone such a little bit of the way! And if I *ever* see you again, it will be so long to wait—perhaps fifty or sixty years!”

“I'll never forget you, Gerty,” said Ada, speaking earnestly, and looking straight into Gerty's eyes. “I think I'll know what you're doing, and I'm nearly sure I'll know when it's time for you to come. I'll think of you, and wait for you; and it will be happier for me, even in heaven, when you are there.”

“Do you think it will be very happy there?” said Gerty, speaking wistfully, but still quietly.

“Oh yes,” said Ada quickly, with brightening eyes.

Jesus will be there ! And then when I am with him I'll be quite good, and never ill any more. Do you know," she added more softly, "I think, when he comes for me, perhaps it will just be like wakening up to see his face, and be quite well again."


Ada had seated herself on a low chair at the window, and, leaning her cheek on her hand, was looking out at the far-away sky. And Gerty, kneeling by her side, had forgotten the golden city and the crystal sea, whose imagined splendours had frightened her in the afternoon. It was to no country of dazzling, bewildering brightness that Ada was going, but home to the Lord who held the little girl's hand, and took the children in his arms long ago. He was the same loving Saviour still; and surely the mansion he had prepared for this little one in his Father's house could be no strange or unhome-like place.

So it was that comfort first came to Gerty—comfort which she never entirely let go through all the days that followed. All that evening she clung to it very close; and though she was very quiet, her companions wondered to see how composed she was. Upstairs, in the sickroom, she read to Ada till nearly bed-time; then kissed her, and bade her good-night very quietly. But when the lights were out, and Mary Carr and May Allardyce asleep, Gerty crept close to the bed which used to be Ada's, and stretching out her arms on it, laid down her head as she had done in the afternoon.

"O God!" said poor Gerty, with all her heart—"O God! thou didst give Ada to me, and I thank thee. And now I give her back to thee, that she may be always with the Lord Jesus Christ. Only, O Lord, take *me* too some day. Give Ada back to me in heaven!"

CHAPTER XXII.

HANDS UNCLASPED AT HEAVEN'S GATE.

HE time of the spring holidays was fast approaching, but all holiday gladness was hushed at Miss Martyn's school. To all questions about Ada's health only sad answers could be given; and even the inexperienced eyes of the girls themselves could see that she was sinking rapidly. She suffered very little except from weakness and weariness; and through all the dulness and confinement of her sickroom life she was wonderfully patient. To the very end her companions came about her; and however silent and languid she might be at other times, their presence always brightened her.

One wet forenoon when Gerty was with her, Ada astonished her by a request that she would bring her trinkets and most valuable possessions. A very small stock they were, consisting almost entirely of presents which her father and mother had sent her. She had never shown any particular affection for them; and was so careless of their welfare, that Gerty had considerable difficulty in hunting them up from the various places they had strayed to. Perhaps no one less accustomed to Ada's habits would have been successful; but Gerty found them all at last, and carrying them upstairs in her apron, arranged them on the table beside their owner: And then as Ada, propped up with pillows on the sofa, took one after an-

other of her things in her little thin hands, Gerty sat and watched her silently for a while. She had generally been accustomed to see Ada in the evening, when she always felt better; and perhaps this was the first time it struck Gerty that she looked very ill. She had had a very bad night; and now, though her cough was quieted, she breathed very hurriedly, and her face looked white and weary against the damp dark hair, which had no brightness in it now. Even her voice sounded tired when she spoke.

"I would have liked everybody to have something to remember me by," said Ada; "but I've so few things, and so many of them are broken. Will you help me to arrange about it, Gerty, and then you can give the things to the girls afterwards?"

Gerty came nearer the table when Ada spoke, but she could not find voice to answer.

"My coral things are for you, Gerty, and I would like you to wear them. You don't wear ear-rings; but you'll wear the necklace, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll wear it," said Gerty, making an effort and speaking steadily. "But the ear-rings are very pretty. Wouldn't you give them to Mary?"

"Yes, that will do beautifully!" said Ada, speaking with some of her old animation of manner. "Do you think she'll like them? She has so many pretty things of her own; but I think she'll put these on sometimes. And this little brooch Aunt Laura sent me at Christmas—"

Gerty winced at the recollection of the bright winter morning when the arrival of Ada's Roman packet and letter had made a sensation at the Burnside breakfast-table. And now, with the little trinket in her hand, Ada's

thoughts had wandered away too, and her eyes were full of tears when she looked up at Gerty.

"Christmas-times are so tiresome at school, Gerty. I thought a pleasant one would never come to me in Scotland—never again till I saw papa and mamma. And then I went to your home. The little brooch means Burnside as well as Aunt Laura, and I would like to give it to some one very nice—some one we both like; do you think it might be Emily?"

"I think it might," said Gerty.

"Will she care to have it? We were so unkind to her once!"

"O Ada, that is all over and done with so long ago!"

"It's not all over," said Ada very sadly. "Sometimes I'm afraid it never will be, and I'm so very, very sorry about you. Do you think people ever forget things of that sort, Gerty?"

"Dear, I'm *sure* Emily never thinks of it now! She is so fond of you, she likes to sit with you better than anything; and she is always trying to think of something she could get you would like. She is always thinking about you, and always speaking about you. Do you think she would be like that, if she kept up a grudge?"

"I think *Emily* has forgotten it now," said Ada; but the cloud was still on her face. "Then, this for her. And about these other things,—will you help me, Gerty?"

Poor Gerty went bravely through it all, keeping back her tears and speaking calmly as Ada went over the remembrances she wished to leave. Her possessions were so few in comparison with her friends, that it was not without some time and trouble that the whole could be decided.

But at last Ada pushed them all together in a heap on the table, and lay quiet, with one hand on them, the other playing with the ribbon round her neck.

"Is that all, dear?" said Gerty at last, thinking of her locket, and wondering if she wished it sent back to her mother.

"No," said Ada, "that's not quite all. I've something more to give; and I want to give it to you, if you will let me. Will you take my baby, Gerty? Will you be kind to May when I am gone?"

Gerty's head was down, and Ada got no answer at first; for indeed this unexpected request was the hardest thing she could have asked from Gerty, who had never been fond of May at all, and since Ada's illness had liked her less than ever. And now she was asked to pledge herself to coax this spoilt child into friendship; then pet, and teach, and protect her, as Ada had done. That was what Ada meant; and if Gerty gave her promise at all, she would keep it fully.

Ada had asked her question point-blank, without any attempt to appeal to her friend's feelings for herself, unless her using May's school-name for the first and only time could be called so; and now she seemed to think any words of persuasion would be useless, and waited Gerty's answer silently. It came at last, but not for what appeared to Gerty herself a very long time.

"I'll try to do it—for your sake."

"Oh no!" said Ada, speaking quickly. "Not for my sake! May is very provoking sometimes; you won't be able to do it for that—but for Christ's sake."

Again Ada had to wait, but this time not so long. And though Gerty did not lift her head, her voice was steady when she answered. "For your sake," said Gerty, repeat-

ing her words again deliberately. "For your sake—and for Christ's sake—I promise, Ada."

That was the last private talk between the two little friends,—they were never alone together again. But for a few more days Gerty came upstairs in the evening to tell schoolroom news, or go on with their favourite stories; and when Ada was lifted from the sofa to the bed, Gerty, kneeling beside her with her hand clasped in hers, would read aloud from the Testament she had given her long ago. And reading of the Saviour who had loved them both, and died for them,—the Saviour who was coming so soon to take Ada to himself,—earth would seem far away, and heaven nearer to Gerty than it had ever been before. When she left Ada for the night and went down to her companions again she was very quiet, but always gentle, with a gentleness that was very unlike her old self.

So it went on for a while. And as the two little girls went down hand in hand to the brink of the river, they almost forgot they could not cross together; only *one* was going just then to enter the celestial city.

The change came very suddenly at the last. One day, the bitterest time to Gerty of all Ada's illness, the little friends were entirely separated. For Ada, tossing restlessly, did not know the watchers round her bed; and all through the hours of that day and the night that followed her weary little brain wandered back to past scenes. She was again in the schoolroom learning lessons with Gerty, or repeating them in her classes; oftener still among her companions at play-time, talking as if they were all around her. Or sometimes she seemed to fancy her mother was with her, and repeated her name over and over again tenderly, speaking to her in the language of her early childhood.

Then there came a morning when all music was hushed,

and even in the far-away schoolroom the girls moved softly, and spoke below their breath. Ada had fallen into a troubled sleep for a time; but while it was still early a message was sent to Gerty that she was awake and asking for her. When the summons came to Gerty, seated at her desk beside Ada's vacant place, she laid down her books and passed out from among her companions without a word. She had been told that Ada might not know her; but as Gerty entered the sickroom she looked up with her old sunny smile to greet her. "Gerty, come and sit close beside me, and tell me about school."

Mrs. Martyn could not look at the two little girls. She hid her face and wept like a child, while Gerty took her chair by the bed and began to talk of the schoolgirl-life which Ada was never to enter any more. But Gerty's voice was steady as she told about the masters who had come, and what had happened in the classes, going over all the trifling incidents she had learned to treasure up for Ada during the days of her illness. And though Ada seemed scarcely able to attend to her, the very sound of Gerty's voice soothed her, and she was always more restless and weary when she stopped speaking. "Don't go away, Gerty," she kept repeating; "sit where I can see you, and oh! please, don't go away!"

Mrs. Martyn went to rest, and her place was taken by Miss Framm for a while; but during the hours of that long forenoon, Gerty, sitting with her arm on the pillow, never once changed her place. She did not even turn round when Miss Maria entered the room, though she knew who it was that came near the bed, even before she spoke to Ada. But to any other voice but Gerty's poor Ada gave little heed that day. She did not speak at first, and Gerty had to tell her who it was.

"Do you not know me, Ada?" said Miss Maria, speaking gently, as the child raised her large dark eyes from Gerty's face to hers.

Ada paused a little, looking at her steadily, and rousing herself into consciousness as if with an effort. "I have wanted to speak to you," she said at last. "I meant to have tried harder to be good, when I came downstairs again. I have been trying,—only it is so difficult,—but I wish I had managed better. I have given you a great deal of trouble, and been very naughty sometimes. Do you think you could forgive me, before you say good-bye?"

"Yes, dear, I forgive you—"

"And perhaps," said Ada, still speaking with some hesitation—"perhaps, after a little, you'll forget that Gerty used to be my chosen friend and companion?"

Ada's thoughts had gone back to the time when Miss Maria had found her and Gerty in the schoolroom at Emily Gordon's open desk; and perhaps her governess too remembered it, and the words she had used then. Miss Maria could scarcely give the answer which Ada waited for wistfully.

"I shall always remember it, dear," she said at last. "But not—in the way you mean."

She was more moved than Gerty or any one else had ever seen her, and when Ada held out her hand to bid her good-bye, Miss Maria kept it in hers for a minute silently, then stooped to kiss the little pale face on the pillow.

The doctor had come and gone, and hours passed on, but no one made any attempt to send Gerty away. Then, as she sat beside her friend with her hand on hers, she remembered her absent companions, and the grief that had clouded the whole school.

Formerly, even while she was proud of Ada's popularity, she had been half-jealous of the affection she bestowed upon the other girls; but now she spoke with a thoughtfulness for them which she could not have shown a few months ago.

"But the other girls, Ada! They are all so fond of you, and they are not allowed to come. And when Fräulein goes back to the schoolroom, they'll want to hear about you. Don't you think you might send them a message?"

"They will be sure to want to hear from Ada."

As Miss Framm spoke, she was moving the pillows to raise the little girl's head, and Ada thanked her with a smile of recognition.

"Tell them to meet me in heaven. There's no use of sending them my love, because they know it." But there was a troubled tone in her voice again, as she added after a minute, "About the things—I don't remember—I think I must be getting very stupid, for I forget."

"Never mind, dear, because I know. You told me before who the things were for; I remember all you said, and I'll give them."

"But not my locket. No one must take it off, for mamma gave it to me before she went away, and I would like to have it when I meet her at the resurrection."

She went back again to her soft Italian words, seeming unconscious she was using them. And when Mrs. Martyn returned she took no notice.

It had been a dull and misty morning; but as the day went on it brightened, and now the whole sickroom was filled with the spring sunshine. But though Ada's face was turned to the window the light was growing dim to her, and her voice was almost frightened when she spoke again to Gerty,—

"Where are you, Gerty? It's getting very dark."

"I'm here, my darling, close beside you, holding your hand."

She was quiet for a little, as if satisfied. But presently she spoke again, fancying she was back in the old room where Gerty and she used to sleep,—

"It's getting so dark. Don't you think we ought to read now? I'm afraid we can't wait for Mary to-night, for it must be very late, and I'm *so* tired."

"O dear Ada! try to lie still and rest!"

"But we haven't read; we might have done it together, if it had only been light enough. *Why* was the gas put out so soon?"

"It's daylight still; it's quite light round about, Ada. Don't you see me sitting beside you?"

Still there was the anxious, restless look on Ada's face, and the friends round her bed knew not how to comfort her. But as Gerty turned round in distress, the sight of Ada's Testament lying on the little table near her brought a sudden thought of hope.

The room was very quiet as Gerty slipped from her chair, and kneeling down by the bed, took Ada's hand in hers.

"I can see, dear Ada! I'm going to read to you. I have hold of your hand; I'm very near you."

The others saw the two children together in a flood of light, the sun shining on Gerty's bent head, and brightening Ada's hair.

Gerty had opened the Testament at random, and began to read where Ada had put a mark; and kneeling beside her dying little friend, she read without a quiver in her voice how the Lord Jesus came bringing life and health to the sickroom of a little girl long ago. Was it only the sound of Gerty's voice that soothed her, or did Ada even


then understand the words of her favourite story? They never knew; but as Gerty read the weariness passed altogether out of her face, and she lay still with a smile about her lips, and the sunshine on her hair.

And as Gerty raised her eyes and caught the look on her face, she thought the Lord must be very near. For a minute she hesitated, then slowly and gently let go her hold of Ada's hand. A little longer she knelt there with her eyes on the quiet little face; then the Master came through the sunlight and the silence of the sickroom, and took Gerty's little friend home to Himself for ever.

Part Second.

CHAPTER I.

THE MEMORY OF A PROMISE.

HE summer holidays were ended, and again Gerty had left her father's house in the country, and kissing her mother in Miss Martyn's prim drawing-room, bade good-bye to all her home-life for a while. It was no new world, however, that the girl was entering now, but a very familiar one—a world too in which Gerty herself was an important and influential personage. For three years and a half had passed since that April day when she first went to school at Miss Martyn's, and thought that the spring sunshine was mocking her in her misery.

There was no need for Miss Maria this time to guide and introduce her to governesses and companions, as that redoubtable lady had once done for the little home-sick child, who had kept her mouth tight shut, and looked straight before her with hard dry eyes in her terrible struggle not to cry. As Gerty took her way alone with quick firm steps down the long passage to the schoolroom, she had some compassionate thoughts to spare for that shy, proud, miserable little girl who had gone the same road three

years ago. She paused at the door for a moment with recollections of mingled pathos and amusement that brought a smile to her lips and a tender sadness to her eyes. But the pause was only for a moment. Gerty had never much time to spend on mere dreaming; her life was too earnest and too full for that.

When she entered the schoolroom there was a stir of surprise and pleasure among the girls, who were for the most part grouped about the fire, gossiping listlessly. They came forward and greeted her eagerly, gathering about her in an outburst of demonstrative affection, such as is peculiar to their kind—all talking at once, and kissing, hugging, and pulling about the object of their tenderness. Gerty returned the caresses and answered the questions heaped upon her very affectionately, but with more gravity and composure of manner than is usual with schoolgirls of fifteen. Gerty was not given either to gushing or giggling, and was considered very old and sedate for her years. When she stood disengaged from her companions, after the first hubbub of their welcome was over, it could be clearly seen that she was growing into a womanhood that would be much comelier than her childhood had been. No one could call Gerty plain, seeing her now, a tall girl whose straight figure was well shown off by her dark close-fitting winter-dress, her brown hair in thick plaits about her head, and those dark gray eyes of hers shining out from under her broad brow, and softening the firm expression which the mouth gave to her face. Time had changed Gerty Stuart's appearance much. If not exactly what is called pretty, then she was something better.

On the rest of Miss Martyn's school time had wrought changes too. Old girls had gone and new ones come; those that remained were altered. In the group that gathered

round Gerty there were faces that were unknown even to her; but though she was by no means unobservant of the new girls, her first interest was about old acquaintances.

Seated as close to the fire as she could bring her chair, leaning carelessly back with an open book in her lap, the eldest of the party had taken least share in the obstreperous welcome given to Gerty. She was a pretty girl—very pretty in a somewhat peculiar style, small and slight, with delicate features, wavy hair soft as silk and black as jet, and bright dark eyes like a gipsy's. All evening long Nettie Cathcart had been teasing her companions new and old in the intervals of her novel-reading with as great zest as she had ever teased Miss M'Kenzie. But Miss M'Kenzie, and all the rest of the generation Nettie had formerly belonged to, had passed away, and she who had been the youngest of the elder girls was now in age the head of the school. But the power and influence which ought to have gone with such a position were not Nettie Cathcart's, but belonged to others.

"Here I am again, Gerty, you see," said the young lady coolly, in answer to the slightly surprised look that lighted on her. "You and Emily Gordon won't be able to make the model school yet a while. Before the holidays were over I had time to make up my mind that Miss Maria was decidedly preferable to Mrs. Cathcart, so I told papa I did not wish to be finished this year after all."

"Oh!" said Gerty, a little stiffly. She had not much sympathy with this pretty, impudent, flippant girl who flaunted her home troubles before every one's face, and openly professed to care for nothing and nobody but herself and her own amusement. Gerty turned away from Nettie Cathcart, and, looking in vain for the faces she most wished to see, asked eagerly, "Have the Gordons not come yet?"

"Yes—no," was the answer. "They're in town; they were here to-day for a little while, but they're still staying at their aunt's."

Gerty was anxious to hear more of the Gordons, but restrained her further curiosity on the subject till she had asked something of the welfare of the girl who spoke to her. "When did you come, Ellen? Where did you go for the holidays? And how's Maggie?"

"I came this afternoon. We were at the sea-side for six weeks; I was tired enough of it. Maggie's all right, of course—she always is; what's the use of asking? She's as strong as a horse," said Ellen Murray, whose manners neither years nor Miss Maria's reproofs had been able to tone down into refinement. Yet, ungracious as her answers to Gerty seemed, she was well pleased at the inquiries, for she secretly set a high value on the friendly interest of her old rival, and was curiously jealous of her love for Emily Gordon.

It was some time before Gerty could continue the questions she was longing to put, for the younger girls closed round her again, pouring miscellaneous information on her, brought from all quarters but the one she was particularly interested in.

"Do you know Miss Maria has got another new black silk?"—"No, *two*; I'm sure she's got two new ones, Gerty!"—"And Mr. Sherwood's been and got married in the holidays. The Murrays know his wife."—"Did you hear that the doctor says Miss Martyn may stay here this winter and not go to England at all?"—"I like that new dress of yours, Gerty; I wish mamma would get my dresses made by your dressmaker—"

"Did you see Minnie Gordon to-day as well as Emily?" said Gerty at last, taking advantage of the first lull in the

storm of disjointed chatter around her. Then the tempest rose again immediately, the news about Minnie Gordon being imparted to Gerty by several different speakers, all talking loud and very fast.

"You mean the little one?"—"She's not little. She's tall like a lamp-post,—but such a baby-face!"—"She's not at all the sort of sister you would expect Emily to have; she does nothing but laugh straight on."—"Yes, I never saw such a funny thing; she's quite a new specimen. I don't know what Miss Maria will make of her."

"And when do Emily and Minnie come here to stay?" said Gerty, again seizing the opportunity of putting a question.

No one could answer this but Molly Smith, whose face, round and plump as ever, took an expression of self-satisfied importance over her own superior information.

"They're coming to-morrow. I heard them talking to Mrs. Martyn about it. And the big downstairs-bedroom is getting ready for them; and you're to sleep with them there, Gerty."

"That can't be true," said Gerty quickly, "for Mrs. Martyn sent me herself to the old room to take off my things."

"Only for to-night, because the other room isn't ready," said Molly, a little piqued that her information was doubted. "I know it's true, Gerty, for I heard it all—every word! And Mrs. Martyn thinks the putting you into the big best room a—a—a sort of a compliment to you, Gerty. Miss Catheart, and I don't know who else, are to be in your old room with May."

Gerty looked so very grave at the idea of the compliment to be paid to her that the girls all gazed at her with some astonishment, and Nettie Cathcart bade her confess openly

that even she would find it rather dull to be a room-mate of the Gordons.

"No; I should like it of all things," said Gerty, rousing up at that. "But it can't be. And you're to sleep in the room with May,—are you, Nettie?"

"Yes," said Miss Cathcart with a shrug of the shoulders. "It matters little to me. The child is perfectly harmless; all spirit has been knocked out of her long ago."

"All the same," said Ellen Murray in her rude way, "it shows that the Martyns haven't much respect for you, when they put you to sleep with a small chit like May, and give Gerty and the Gordons the best room in the house—and them younger than you, and not nearly so long at school!"

"To think that Mrs. Martyn didn't respect me would be heartbreaking," said Nettie. "It's hard enough to bear the disappointment of not being in the same room with Miss Gordon of Laverock Hall."

"Oh, you do feel being slighted that way! You needn't pretend not to," persisted Ellen Murray.

It was well for the peace of Miss Martyn's school that one girl, formerly ready to quarrel as any, had been for years practising lessons of patience and gentleness, and in learning to control herself had unconsciously learned to control others also. Gerty made haste to stop the bandying of words between the two girls before the warfare grew hotter; and it was Nettie Cathcart's side she went to, though, as I said before, she had no particular love for this girl, who had indeed but an instant before given her a passing thrust of malice which had been very sharp. Of the two, Gerty certainly preferred Ellen Murray, for she believed her to be at least honest, and to a certain degree friendly. But Gerty's ways were guided now by the words of a book which tells about rendering good for evil; and

as it seemed to her that Nettie Cathcart must certainly be getting hurt, she made haste to come to her aid.

"What you say is nonsense, Ellen. Mary Carr was once sent to sleep in that very room with May Allardyce, and there never was a girl that Mrs. Martyn and Miss Maria thought so much of as Mary Carr—Mary Haye, I ought to say."

Gerty's diversion was completely successful. All interest was turned to another subject, and voices from every side demanded an account of "the marriage."

"Mary looked beautiful," said Gerty, with shining eyes. "She was like a queen in her bride's dress,—and so sweet and happy! Dr. Haye is tall and handsome, too. I liked him very much; he is *almost* good enough for his wife. The terrible pity is that he is taking her away to India, so far off from all her friends and relations. They are to sail in a fortnight."

"There are worse misfortunes than being far off from one's friends and relations," observed Nettie Cathcart. "Were you a bridesmaid, Gerty?"

"Yes; there were six, in green and white. But isn't it a pity to begin now, when the tea-bell may ring, every minute? Wait till after tea, and then I can tell you all about it from the very beginning."

"That's just like Gerty," was the laughing answer; "she does so like to give a regular, long, connected story. Well, do as you like—only you're to tell us everything, you know."

"To be sure I will, Marion," said Gerty, laughing back again to the girl who had spoken. "It was the first marriage I was ever at since I was old enough to remember, so of course it was great fun to me—the Great Event, the boys call it at home, and they say I'm always talking about it."

"*The Marriage*, they call it here," said Nettie Cathcart; "as if there had never been a marriage in the world before, and would never be again. The same sort of thing as *The Flood*." Then turning to one of the new girls, who was sitting near her, shy and silent, she added, "Before you've been at Miss Martyn's very long, Miss Maitland, you'll find you hear a great deal about Mary Carr!"

"She was one of our old girls," said Gerty, trying to explain to the stranger, and draw her into the conversation. "She left school nearly three years ago, but we never forget her, for there never was a big girl such a favourite as Mary Carr."

"Except Gerty Stuart," said an unexpected voice from one of the little ones.

"Nonsense!" said Gerty, blushing violently, and looking once more like her old awkward self, in her embarrassment and wonder at the bare idea of her being considered a big girl and a favourite. But loving arms were round her immediately; and eager voices, among which Ellen Murray's was the loudest, called out that it was true.

Just then the door opened slowly, and another girl came in and walked with listless, tardy movements towards the fire. She was a pale, rather sickly child of perhaps eleven years old, whose fashionable dress looked nothing but slovenly, so untidily was it worn, and whose long, light hair hung loose and limp about her shoulders. She was the only one in all the school who had no glad welcome for Gerty; she did not notice her at all at first—did not even see she was present, till her companions drew her attention to the fact.

"Here's Gerty. Don't you see Gerty, May?"

"O Gerty, is it you—how do you do?" she said then, with a little start, but not the shadow of a smile, as she

went and held out her hand. When Gerty drew her near and kissed her, she submitted patiently, and then fell back and stood at the other side of the fire, not talking or seeming inclined to talk to anybody.

And the girls, watching her for a little in silent curiosity and some disgust, were thinking that it was not altogether the routine of school and Miss Maria's rigid discipline that had made this spiritless, dejected creature of the pert, unruly child that had once been May Allardyce. May, after two months of home-life and her mother's rule, had recovered none of the childish pink and white that had once been in her cheeks; her spirits seemed dull as ever, and her mouth was drawn into even more fretful lines.

The flush of pleasure had died from Gerty's face, and the smile from her lips, as this child's entrance broke up the affectionate gathering of her schoolfellows around her. When she spoke, it was in a tone of forced gentleness very different from the frank kindliness which had been ringing in her voice a minute before.

"Have you enjoyed your holidays, May?"

"No; I never enjoys anything," was the answer of May, whose apparent incapability of grammatical speech was not her least irritating peculiarity.

"When did you come back?"

"Me? Oh, I came back last evening some time—I forget when."

"And you've forgotten to brush your hair this morning," said the girl standing next May; "and for some days before this, I think. It was as frizzy yesterday as it is now. I should think your home people, if they take nothing else to do with you, might at least see that you go to school tidy!"

May made no answer, and except that her mouth and

her brow puckered up a little more, there was no change in the expression of her face.

'Miss Maria won't be too busy to notice you to-morrow,' said Nettie Cathcart; "better get tidy before then, May."

"You won't have Gerty Stuart to keep you right now," said Molly Smith. "She's going to sleep in another room."

Still May did not change her listless, dreary attitude, or show any interest whatever, till the silence among the others forced her to see that some remark from her was expected. Then she looked up for a moment and said, "Oh, is she? I didn't know—"

"Or care," added Nettie Cathcart. "I admire your gratitude, May. You have a nice, affectionate disposition."

Grimaces and inarticulate sounds of anger and disgust testified to the opinions of the other girls on the subject. May Allardyce had never been thought a nice child, and it was certain she had been making rapid progress in her disagreeable ways of late. And they wondered how Gerty could be so outwardly patient as to stand quiet, only biting her lip as she looked at May with a steady gaze that was quite unreadable.

"*Can't* you say you're sorry, May?" said Molly Smith at last, desperately.

"Why?" asked May, twisting herself about in an irritated fashion. "I can't help Gerty going away. I suppose she wants to go, or she needn't go; and it doesn't make me mind. It's only a bother to care who sleeps with anybody. I never didn't like sleeping with Gerty more than any other girl."

"There's only one thing plain in all May's speeches," said Nettie, "and that's their nastiness."

"Come, May," said Gerty then, "come and get tidy for tea. I think my hair must be rather a mess too."

"But they're saying I'm not to be in the room with you any more," said May, following Gerty nevertheless as she turned to leave the room.

"To-night you are. After that I may be somewhere else; but nothing's settled yet."

The more interested listeners among the girls did not fail to note the difference of tone and manner with which Gerty now spoke of the removal which she had first said so firmly "couldn't be," and there was no difficulty in guessing the reason of the change.

"Horrid little wretch!" said Ellen Murray. "I hope Gerty will give her a good blowing-up when she gets her alone in her room, and tell her what a nasty thing she is, and that not another girl in the school would have done for her what *she's* done."

"Not she!" said Marion Campbell, in a tone which was half-provoked and half-admiring. "Gerty will talk very little to her at all, and she'll brush her hair and make her decent quite quietly. I know quite well how she goes on with May in such circumstances."

Then other subjects of talk came up, and the conversation in the schoolroom took sudden starts, and then flagged again, and sometimes came to a complete stop, after the usual fashion of conversations when some of the party are tired, some strangers, some miserable, and all unsettled.

Miss Framm came to the schoolroom presently with the new French governess; and at last the sound of the tea-bell made a welcome diversion. Then Gerty and May re-appeared, and the girls went off to the dining-room two and two—Gerty walking with the most forlorn-looking of the new-comers, Isabel Maitland.

Kind Mrs. Martyn presided as of yore, and Gerty's seat was near her, and most of her talk at tea-time was with the good old lady. Mrs. Martyn knew about Burnside now well, and had a great admiration for Gerty's mother. She was interested, too, in the fact of Fred being at the Edinburgh Academy this year, and had altogether so much to say about Gerty's home affairs that it was not till they were rising from table that she remembered to tell her—"Don't settle down in your old room, my dear. You're to sleep there to-night, but after that I think we'll put you somewhere else. I have a nice plan for you—we'll talk about it to-morrow."

She nodded her head, looking so pleased and mysterious that Gerty was both touched and amused, and felt she could say nothing that might displease her then.

With a half-sigh she turned back to the schoolroom, but there she soon forgot her troubles, for she was immediately claimed to fulfil her promise of telling about Mary Carr's wedding from "the very beginning to the very end." Gerty told her tale with intense zest, grudging neither time nor trouble in going into the minutest particulars, and well repaid by the delighted attention her listeners gave her. She was not rich in small talk, but in telling of any event which interested her Gerty could make a capital story out of it; and the schoolgirls had long ago discovered this gift of hers, and made her use it for their benefit. So it came to pass that the evening slipped away pleasantly, and the hour for prayers arrived unexpectedly soon.

Only May had paid no heed to the tale, but kept in her own room all the time—unpacking, she said. And, in truth, she had been busy enough, though all the things had been taken out of her box and put away before. For May, who with all her slovenliness had a passionate love of finery,

had brought forth all her new possessions and displayed them on the bed, as if expecting a burst of admiration from her companions at the sight. She had had a birthday, too, during the holidays, and got several presents of trinkets from her relatives, so she prepared her whole stock of ornaments, new and old, that she might adorn herself with them immediately after prayers. When Nettie and Gerty, who had lingered a little over the "good-nights" with their companions, came at last to their bedroom together, they found May awaiting them by the side of her bed and its litter of gay little garments, her head for once erect to show off the ear-rings in her ears and the chain of the locket about her neck, a couple of brooches on her breast, under which her hands were clasped in careful display of the rings on her fingers.

The sight was a laughable one,—though it was pathetic and humiliating, too, in its childish folly and vanity. Gerty had never felt so helpless and provoked over May as she did now, when she saw how the melancholy child had recovered her spirits in this operation of decking herself out, and with what animation she turned to the bed to point out the most costly of her treasures there.

"May, I'm afraid you care for nothing in the world but these things!" said Gerty, standing looking rather grimly from one to another of the bits of finery.

Gerty did not believe in lecturing, partly because she thought that nothing of that sort had ever done *her* any good, partly because she doubted her own capabilities of pointing a calm and forcible moral. So now she said not another word to May. She took up the things from the bed,—the braided piqué and the be-ribboned muslin, the velveteen with the feather trimming, the laced handkerchief, and the embroidered petticoat, and she folded them all up

quickly and laid them away in their places. May slunk off silently to a far-away corner. Nettie Cathcart looked on amused. "Well done, Gerty!" she said, as the last garment disappeared. "That is expeditious!"

Gerty's only reply was the sharp clap with which she finally shut the drawer. It must be confessed she was very much out of temper.

"Gerty, you are admirable," said Nettie. "I have a great respect for you." Afterwards, out of the midst of her novel-reading, to which she settled down almost immediately, Nettie looked up every now and then to say, "You're a worthy character, Gerty," or, "Gerty, you're a strong-minded woman."

Gerty never spoke in return, and these remarks were the only ones which broke the silence of the room.

The time for the gas being turned out found them all in bed, and May asleep. But the room had been scarcely ten minutes in darkness before Gerty heard a rustling in it, and then the sound of a match being struck. She turned round immediately.

"Miss Cathcart!"

"Miss Stuart!"

The mimicry of Gerty's tone of surprise and questioning was as coolly and successfully done as if the imitator had not been very disagreeably surprised to find any one awake but herself.

"*Nettie!* what are you going to do?"

"See whether Miss Maria is in bed yet," said Nettie, lighting the gas. "No, she isn't. Well, I shall sit up a little while too." She wrapped her dressing-gown about her, and proceeded to get her writing materials out on the table, Gerty meanwhile watching her in great perturbation of mind.

"You're not going to keep the gas burning?"

"Yes, for a little, till I've written a letter. You don't want to go to sleep, you good child, at this unearthly early hour? You should rather get up and get something done for yourself—or see! there is the 'Woman in White' lying on my bed. I think it's very kind of me to light the gas, so that you may have the chance of enjoying yourself for one evening. Emily Gordon will never let you have any light after it's ten o'clock. Of that you may be sure."

"Yes," said Gerty simply. "I *am* quite sure. Put the gas out here, please, Nettie."

"Presently—when I've finished my letter." Gerty said nothing just immediately, and Nettie, who had already begun to write, added with a touch of sarcasm, "If any of the Martyns chance to come, I shall see that you are safe. I shall say that you protested—you need not be afraid of your excellent self getting into trouble."

"I'm not afraid of that," said Gerty; "and you know it."

In truth, she was not much afraid either of Nettie getting into trouble. The chances were very small that either of the Miss Martyns or any one else in authority would come that way; for not only was it probable that they were all too busy with their private enjoyments to act as night-police, but there was that wonderful luck of Nettie's which was quite a proverb in the school. No one ever expected her to be caught in mischief, or discovered in the most daring breakage of rules. It was no fear of consequences that made Gerty firm in her protests.

"Nettie," she said, in a voice trembling and husky, not with irresolution, but from her intense dislike to the task she had to do, "you must turn it out—*now*, please."

"Why?"

The question was very sharply spoken, and in answer

to it Gerty could find no words to express what she thought ; yet she was firmly convinced in her own mind that this practice of keeping a private store of matches, and burning light after the hour appointed for darkness and bed, was a very dishonourable one.

“Why?” said Nettie again, with a still more incisive ring in her voice.

And Gerty only answered, “Because, if you don’t—I must.”

The other girl found herself unexpectedly in a most unpleasant predicament. To yield would be galling ; but, on the other hand, Nettie felt that a quarrel would be even more degrading to a person like herself, who was famous for never getting into trouble, and never losing her temper. And as for trying to get her own way by wheedling, that was out of the question ! Even if such had ever been Nettie Cathcart’s custom, she knew it would be useless in this case ; for not Emily Gordon herself was more difficult to move than Gerty, when she had once taken her stand about a question of right and wrong.

“Gerty, you might be a nice girl if you weren’t such a prig,” said Nettie.

But she rose and put away her desk, and threw off her dressing-gown, and turned out the gas.

It could scarcely be expected, however, that Nettie would readily forgive Gerty for daring to interfere with her doings ; and she prided herself on making those who offended her very soon regret it.

“You have done a good night’s work, Gerty,” she said as she lay down. “You have kept me from writing a letter I wanted to write to a friend, who will be anxious when no letter comes. And that after thoroughly frightening that wretched little May Allardyce, and sending her to bed

miserable." Then after a moment she added,—“What a nice thing it is to lie in bed wide-awake for an hour or two in the dark! But then I can occupy myself with good and profitable thoughts. They will all be about you, Gerty, regrets that you are not to be with us to-morrow night. As for you, you will sleep in peace after your victories—for you’ve got the upper hand of both your room-mates. If it’s any satisfaction to you, Gerty, there’s no doubt of that!”

It was true, but Gerty did not feel much like a conqueror as she turned wearily and silently away. On the contrary, she was wishing with all her heart to flee from the battlefield. She longed to go back to dear Burnside, where no such conflicts were possible; if that might not be, she longed at least to escape to the peaceful downstairs-chamber, where the Gordons would give her love and help. Oh yes, she must go, she must go!

It is wonderful what excellent reasons we can give ourselves to make wrong seem right. An inward voice told Gerty now that she had really no choice in this matter of leaving her old room for another. Mrs. Martyn had settled it all, and thought she was doing Gerty a favour; would it not be presumptuous, rude, unkind to ask the old lady to reverse her decision now? The Gordons, too—what would they think of Gerty’s friendship if she refused to share their chamber, and probably forced them thereby to have a stranger as their room-mate—a new girl, who would doubtless be uncongenial even after they came to know her? Oh yes! for Mrs. Martyn’s sake and the Gordons’, Gerty must go.

There was really no reason against it either, when the affair was thought over calmly. It was quite time May learned to look after herself; surely every girl of eleven years old ought to be independent, as Gerty herself had

been when she first came to school. And May would never learn to do anything useful until she was obliged ; it was really not at all for her good that she should have Gerty always with her to act as governess and maid. As for other things—May had no love for Gerty, would not miss anything but her services, would feel no grief whatever in losing her companionship. There would be nothing really unkind, then, in Gerty going away.

Nettie would be glad to get rid of her, too ; and doubtless one of the governesses would come to sleep in Gerty's place—the new Mademoiselle likely, so that Miss Cathcart would perfect her French and be obliged to behave herself. Yes, it would be better for Nettie also that Gerty should go away. Why then should she make herself unhappy by insisting still to sleep in the room with the only girls in all the school who did not love her ?

Then some idea came over Gerty that she was trying hard to deceive herself, for against all these plausible arguments—some of which were true enough in themselves—stood the memory of a promise. Whatever might be said in favour of Gerty's removal, this thing was certain, that it would be once and for ever giving up May Allardyce. And finding herself so terribly close to that, Gerty started and shrunk back in an agony of terror, as if it were the brink of a precipice she had come to in the darkness unaware.

Once more, as of old, on the first night away from home, Gerty slipped noiselessly on the floor, and knelt down by her white bed, while the others slept. Not now because she had not prayed before ; Gerty had felt no fear of showing her colours before Nettie Cathcart, who, indeed, knew well enough, and had known for long, what they were. Nor was it to go through a formal duty she rose this time in the

silence and the darkness ; it was in eager search for help in a time of sore need. Her mind was all in confusion ; right and wrong seemed hopelessly mixed up together ; she could not distinguish which was the voice of the good and which of the evil angel speaking in her soul. Only she knew that if God did not save her no one else could.


So with broken, disjointed sentences, bitter tears, and passionate, sorrowful repetitions, which were surely not vain, Gerty prayed in the dark, while not a sound passed her lips to tell the other girls anything of the secrets of that time of loneliness. Nettie Cathcart, in spite of the wakeful hours which she had foretold, never knew of the last, sorest battle that Gerty fought and won that night.

For once more she lay down a conqueror, but a nobler one this time. When Gerty put her weary head again on the pillow, she knew that her resolution was taken and her promise safe ; nothing but Mrs. Martyn's positive command would separate her from May. For stronger than all other ideas of earthly good or pleasure stood the firm belief in Gerty's mind that God would one day require this child's soul at her hands. She must watch and wait for it yet with renewed patience and faith ; she must pray as she had never prayed before that God would fasten the cords of love about her and May, who had been only bound together as yet by the ties of duty and necessity.

So it came to pass that Nettie Cathcart's words came true, and after her victories Gerty slept in peace. But it was because at last she was thinking not of her companions, nor even of the dear home-friends ; for the music that lulled Gerty to rest was the notes of a song of triumph that was heavenly in its strain,—“ Thanks be unto God, who *giveth* us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

CHAPTER II.

THE GIRLS WHO WERE GOOD TO GERTY.

HE fruits of Gerty's last struggle and triumph were chiefly visible next morning in her humble and persistent attempts at kindness with her two companions. She was quite ready to accuse herself of being harsh to May and overbearing to Nettie the evening before; indeed, Gerty was generally almost morbidly sensitive on the subject of what she considered her own very unpleasant ways of doing right. And in one of the cases in question she was not even sure that she had been (however unpleasantly) doing right. Perhaps she was really unjust to May; and, after all, the little girl who turned out her own finery for inspection in the bedroom ought not to have been severely judged by the elder one who had so thoroughly enjoyed describing wedding-dresses and presents in the schoolroom. So in the morning Gerty, by way of making amends to May, looked in the drawers at the pretty new dresses, and bestowed a few words of admiration on them, as she smoothed out their folds more carefully than she had taken time to do last night.

Yet again came the doubt whether she were acting wisely, when May brightened up as nothing but vanity ever made her brighten, and burst forth immediately into foolish babbling talk on that great subject of dress which seemed, alas! the only one which could take deep root in her mind

It was so hard to know how to deal with this child! And Gerty had not the clue of sympathy which love alone could give to guide her through that perplexing overgrowth of childish and yet in some ways most unchildlike folly which was all that May's character showed as yet. Well, but she was not going to lose hope. Please God, she would get that clue some day.

With Nettie Cathcart Gerty was surer of her ground, and being convinced she was in the right was not disposed to yield one inch to her; but nevertheless she was anxious that all should be smooth between them, and was quite ready to forgive Nettie's bitter words. However, Gerty's attempts at being friendly during the time of dressing were received with very cold civility by the elder girl, and she could only leave it to time and patience to re-establish amicable relations between her and Nettie again.

Gerty had indeed enough to do and think of that day, for new and old masters and classes, books and music, had all to be arranged, and the very first moment of leisure she had after breakfast Mrs. Martyn led her away to introduce her to what she intended to be her new sleeping-apartment. Gerty's heart was sore—and none the less so because she had known what was coming—when the kind old lady, after making her admire all the new fittings in the large pretty room, told her how it was all planned that she was to sleep there with Emily Gordon and her little sister. She had thought of various ways of refusing the favour, but not being able to decide which would seem the least ungracious, she judged it best simply to thank Mrs. Martyn for her kindness, and beg that she might still be allowed to stay with May Allardyce. After all, it was not difficult to gain Mrs. Martyn's consent to her request, though Gerty could not help feeling that the old lady was inclined to be

a little resentful of a supposed slight to the Gordons, as well as vexed at the failure of her own plan to give all three girls pleasure.

“Of course, if you don’t want it, my dear,” said she, “I would be sorry to change you. It’s all the same to me to put some one else here, of course; and, to be sure, you’ve been a long time now in the same room, and perhaps it’s natural you don’t want to leave. But, you know, I always thought you liked Miss Gordon so much, my dear, that you would enjoy being with her rather than Miss Cathcart. But there are other young ladies that will be quite glad to come down to this room—and older ones, too, that ought perhaps to have got the first chance. But then Miss Maria has such a high opinion of you, Gertrude, my dear—”

It was hard to hear Mrs. Martyn talk on in this fashion and feel it impossible to explain. It was harder still to be obliged to dash the joy with which the Gordons on their arrival greeted Gerty, when Emily’s face took the only bright look it had for any one that day, and Minnie clasped her sister’s friend round the neck and gave her the warmest of kisses. Yet, through all Mrs. Martyn’s misunderstanding and the Gordons’ disappointment, Gerty kept to her resolution firmly. After all, the hardest had been got over last night all alone in the dark.

The news of Gerty’s refusal to leave her old quarters was communicated to the elder girls at twelve o’clock by Molly Smith, who appeared then in the first-classroom to announce that it was too wet to go out; Mrs. Martyn had said that, and she had also said that Gerty Stuart was *not* to sleep in the downstairs-room with the Gordons. The girls all looked at Emily, who, apparently not at all surprised by either of Molly’s pieces of information, had taken her seat by the window and already got out her work.

"Gerty not going to sleep with the Gordons ! Why ?"

"Because she won't leave May Allardyce," said Molly.

There was a silence of surprise and reflection, and then Nettie Cathcart asked, "What do you say to that, Emily ?"

"It is a great disappointment to us," said Emily quietly, though the delicate paleness of her cheeks flushed into red for a moment ; "but we can say nothing, for she is doing what she thinks right."

Then there was another silence, which was broken by Isabel Maitland asking why Miss Stuart liked May Allardyce so much.

"Like her !" said Ellen Murray, with indignant scorn ; "she likes her no more than the rest of us do—and, I can tell you, that's not saying much."

"Then why is she so good to her ?" persisted the new girl, to whom the laws, mysteries, and relationships of school-life seemed as yet a profoundly interesting study.

"Ah ! that's what none of us know," answered Molly, gravely shaking her head.

"But we can all have a very good guess," added Ellen Murray, in a tone so gruff that Isabel was afraid to venture any more questions on the subject.

Then Gerty herself came in, laughing and talking with Minnie Gordon, and certainly looking not in the least either like a heroine or a martyr. In truth, Gerty felt much relieved now that the burden of decision and explanation was off her, and was quite ready to devote herself to making acquaintance with this new specimen of the Gordon family, who was only too willing to respond to her friendly advances. Minnie was curiously like and yet unlike her elder sister. She had the same delicate look, pure colourless complexion, and innocent large eyes ; but while

Emily's slight figure was decidedly under the middle height, and her expression and manner gravely gentle, Minnie was a tall slip of a girl, whose face was all shining with frank mirthfulness.

When Emily introduced her to Miss Framm, and that lady, amused at the happy looks so unusual with newcomers at Miss Martyn's, asked her how she would like school, Minnie answered immediately, "Oh so much! so much! I think this is a delightful place."

"You are a fortunate girl, you see," said the governess; "it is not every one who begins school with a sister to go with her, and a friend ready waiting."

Minnie blushed a little, but more with pleasure than embarrassment, as she turned to Gerty with the sweetest, brightest smile and put her arm round her waist. Gerty did not return the embrace; she was not demonstrative in her affection to any of her companions, and after all Minnie was a stranger; but there was something very attractive to her in the loving, childlike ways of Emily Gordon's little sister. Indeed, Gerty felt herself looking down with a sort of protecting tenderness not unmixed with amusement on this gladsome, guileless girl, who was not much below herself either in height or years. For, by force of her nature as well as through circumstances, Gerty had lived through so much more than most girls of her age, that it was no wonder she felt herself very old and experienced by the side of Minnie Gordon. She had fought battles with foes of whose existence the other child had never dreamed; she had passed through the depths of waters whose waves had scarcely wet Minnie's feet as yet. And while Gerty mused on the felt difference between herself and the little girl who was so anxious to be her friend, the rest of the company were comparing the two Gordon sisters—only

Miss Framm had eyes for the contrast between Gerty and Minnie.

Rousing herself from her reverie at last, Gerty disengaged herself from Minnie, and addressing herself to all and sundry said rather hastily, "We came here on business. We want to know who will come to the schoolroom and have some fun with the children—a regular silly game. The sillier game, the better fun."

"The Priest of the Parish, if Miss Cathcart will play," cried Molly Smith. "The last time she was Priest's Fool Miss Maria came in, and she jumped up and offered her her seat, so very politely, we all laughed, and had to pay forfeits and change places. But how could we help it? For if you had seen Miss Maria! She was angry, but she couldn't understand, and she couldn't find anything to scold about; for, you know, somehow, whatever Miss Cathcart does she takes good care never to get lines."

"A very sensible girl she is, then," said Nettie; "I would advise all young people to take example by her."

"Oh, but you'll come and play," said Molly; "and you'll come and play, Miss Maitland! It's such a funny game. There's the Priest of the Parish in an arm-chair, and the Priest's Fool on a stool beside him—and all the other caps—Red-cap and Blue-cap, or whatever you like—all in a circle—and nobody is allowed to laugh but the Fool—and you mustn't make mistakes—and then there are forfeits. It's such a nice game!"

"And such a nice description of it," said Nettie. "It does make it all very plain to you now,—doesn't it, Miss Maitland? I'm rather of Gerty's opinion, though—the sillier game, the better fun. And this one *is* amusing, though you wouldn't think so from anything Molly says."

"Mademoiselle is going to play," said Gerty. "Every

one ought to come, I think ; but we must be quick, for it's a shame to keep the children waiting. Mrs. Spider or the Priest of the Parish we promised them. I suppose you won't play, Emily?"

Emily shook her head, smiling a little. She had no taste for games whose charm lay in their silliness, for she was utterly devoid of a taste for romping ; she would rather remain where she was now and comfort her heart with the warmth of the thick socks she was knitting for one of her poor pensioners in Perthshire, than follow even Gerty Stuart and her own Minnie into the great noisy school-room.

Gerty would have let her alone, but Nettie Cathcart, who very seldom kept her tongue quiet, must needs urge her to come. "Far better drive away melancholy thoughts by the most childish game," she said, "than sit moping alone. How does it feel to be home-sick, Emily? Do tell me."

"If you don't know, be sorry and ashamed," said Miss Framm in German ; but Nettie Cathcart went off declaring laughingly that she had only cause to be glad and proud of her own immunity from the attacks of that doleful disease which was always so prevalent at the beginning of the term. And though Emily Gordon would not try it, and Nettie Cathcart did not need it, the Priest of the Parish proved an excellent remedy for more than one case of home-sickness, and the faces round the dinner-table afterwards were brighter because of the forenoon romp which had been led off triumphantly by Nettie and Gerty.

During the game these two had fallen into their usual relations to each other ; but afterwards, when Gerty had time to think over it, she could not but fear that this was mere inadvertence on Nettie's part, and that her grudge

remained. She wondered much what Nettie would say on finding out that Gerty was still to be her room-companion, and she had many doubts about how and when it would be best to communicate this intelligence to her. And, busied with such thoughts, Gerty was alone in the schoolroom getting out her drawing-board and pencils in preparation for her class, when Miss Cathcart entered, and advancing towards her, struck a theatrical attitude and held out her hand.

"Gertrude, I forgive you," she said grandiloquently.

"What for?" asked Gerty, unable to keep her gravity.

"For last night's work," said Nettie solemnly.

"Thank you very much!"

"You have need. I forgive you also for not taking yourself out of my way, as I expected you were to do. And that's particularly generous and high-souled of me, for I foresee you are going to be a great bother, Gerty."

"Am I?" said Gerty, growing grave again. "I'll try not to be."

"But you *will* be—it's in the nature of things," said Nettie, with a little groan, as she arranged her drawing. "Worse than Kate M'Kenzie you are going to be, I foresee."

"Then you are sorry I am still to sleep with you?"

"Why should I be sorry?" said Nettie, suddenly putting on May Allardyce's fretful tone. "It doesn't make me mind. It's only a bother to care who sleeps with anybody."

"O Nettie!"

"No, I don't like you sleeping with me any less than any other girl—perhaps more," said Nettie, resuming her own voice with the last words. "I always rather liked you, Gerty, though you never would believe it."

"I'll believe it now, then—I'll be only too glad," said Gerty.

It was doubtful whether Nettie heard, for she had already turned round to chatter with the other girls who were beginning to assemble for the class; but, indeed, Gerty was speaking more to herself than any one else, as she sat down at her desk. Her heart was filled with a great thankfulness that where she had been looking for an enemy God had given her a friend. Even Nettie Cathcart was to be among the number of the girls who were so very good to Gerty. For she was firm in her belief in the wonderful kindness of her companions, and her own utter lack of any nice or engaging qualities. In confidential talks at Burnside she had spoken sometimes of her popularity at school, always with a great astonishment mingled with her thankfulness. Once, and only once, had she ever given her mother a hint of what she considered the sole possible reason of the love that was given her.

"They *do* like me, mamma—most of them. I don't know how it is; I think it must have begun with their being sorry for me. Some of them must think of me, perhaps, as I think of May—as if I were something left behind for them to be kind to."

For it was a strange fact that almost never, either at school or at home, did the name of Ada pass Gerty's lips. And yet her childish friendship had changed the world for her. That first year at school cut her life, as it were, into two; for, twined with strength and tenderness inexpressible into all her deepest feelings, was the memory of the little girl who had gone to heaven. Gerty never, from the first, had been inclined to forget Ada was dead; she never watched for her to enter the classroom, never treasured up stories to tell her, or woke in the morning expecting to see

her lying beside her. The long time of sickness, the terrible wrench of parting, the agony and the completeness of the last renunciation, were too real in Gerty's mind for that. But, nevertheless, the figure of this one child stood between her and the rest of her companions for ever; all the sweet first-love of Gerty's girlish friendship was given to Ada still. She stood between Gerty and all others, and yet she drew them close, for it was still the touch of her vanished hand which united the girls she had loved so well to the girl she had loved the best.

A great sorrow like this one which had come upon Gerty when she was so young cannot pass over and leave heart and life the same; there must be a change for better or for worse. And, through the mercy of God, this sorrow brought blessing unspeakable to Gerty, and through her to the rest of Miss Martyn's school. To herself it only seemed that when she had given up her little friend to be for ever with the Lord Jesus Christ, He had made all others friendly to her for Ada's dear sake; but her companions knew also that Gerty, to whom God had given a little girl to help her once, was ready now as no other girl was to help all those who were in any need.

So from Nettie Cathcart, in her conceit and impudence, down to little Meta Campbell, the baby and the pet of the school, they all stood by her loyally and believed in her firmly—all but the child for whom she did the most. That day when Gerty had given up her own wishes, offended Mrs. Martyn, and disappointed the Gordons, on account of May Allardyce, the girl herself took not the least notice of the sacrifice that had been made for her. She never asked—it was doubtful whether she ever heard—why Gerty still remained in the old room. She was altogether occupied with her own troubles, those “nasty, nasty lessons,” which

she never would be persuaded to learn properly, although it had often been impressed upon her that such was, after all, the easiest means of getting over them. In spite of Gerty's efforts as private governess—and many a half-hour which she could ill spare from her own studies she gave to helping May—these lessons were always accumulating, with repetitions and punishment tasks, into terrible mountains of difficulty, which at last would have appalled any one. This day, of course, May had started clear; but Gerty feared her way would soon be blocked up again, for when she came into the large schoolroom before tea there was Miss Allardyce standing in the corner, with tears coursing down her cheeks and falling on the well-known French story-book of punishment, which she held in her two hands.

“O May, have you got lines already?”

“It was ve—very cruel of Miss Martyn,” sobbed May. “She gave me such a l—long bit of that nasty, nasty Winter thing!”

“What was it really?” asked Gerty, turning to Molly Smith.

“She's put into Thomson for English,” was the answer, —“The Seasons—Winter, I suppose—the little twopenny-halfpenny paper copy, you know. Well, she tore it right up through the middle, burst out crying because her lesson in it was so long, and split the thing in two before Miss Martyn's very face. Of course, she got lines.”

“I—I—I couldn't help it,” said May; “I ha—ated it so!”

“And didn't you know there were plenty more Thomsons in the world?” said Gerty. “What good did you do yourself by tearing up this one?” She did not mean in the least to be jocular, be it observed; on the contrary, the


whole matter was serious enough to her. This freak of May's, in its utter imbecility, was very hard to bear. "You have got lines to-night, and you'll have another Winter before it's time to prepare your lessons to-morrow," said Gerty. "Couldn't you have thought of that before you tore it up?"

May sobbed helplessly on. She seldom showed spirit enough to defend herself. Gerty used sometimes to wish she would fly into a passion, be intolerably insolent—do anything, in fact, rather than weep and murmur foolish things, which was all she seemed capable of when she got into trouble now-a-days. Indeed, such outbreaks of rebellion as the tearing up of the "Thomson" were never more than momentary, and had been altogether very unfrequent of late; May's naughtiness had become rather passive than active. "It was so nasty—so nasty!" was all she could say in excuse for herself to Gerty now, and she gave it forth in a weak and pitiful whine.

"Well, let me see if I can help you with your lines," said Gerty at last; and she went and sat down in the corner beside her.

CHAPTER III.

A LEADER'S PLACE, AND ITS DIFFICULTIES.

T was wonderful in how short a time after the session began a full tide of work was flowing in Miss Martyn's school. In other such establishments the first fortnight after the holidays, while masters and classes were being gradually arranged, might be a time of comparative leisure for the girls ; but Miss Maria had no belief in any such necessity, and very remarkable was her talent for bringing everything around her into speedy order. Whenever her pupils were under her charge, work they ought and work they must. And at Miss Martyn's it had really become almost impossible for a girl to shirk any of her duties,—not only because of the penalties denounced against idleness, but also because the head of the school managed to inspire the members thereof with so much of her own energy and thoroughness that hard, determined study was the fashion there. Intense interest and ambition to excel in the various branches of knowledge were the prevailing feelings of the school.

Of course, it sometimes happened that there *were* girls who did not follow the fashion or share the common feeling. May Allardyce was an example of such a one ; but exceptions like her only proved the rule, for May was held in general contempt. Indeed, it must be said that whatever differences of opinion might exist among those who knew

the school about the moral influence, refinement of manners, and general healthiness of tone which pervaded it, there could be no doubt whatever about the immense advantages given there for study.

Into the very midst of healthy, stirring work Gerty gladly plunged this winter. The first drudgery of learning lay behind her—English spelling and grammar, French verbs and German declensions, scales and *Etudes de la Vélocité*, were troubles no longer; and Gerty had not yet arrived at that stage of existence when the business and pleasures of a grown-up young lady's life begin to interfere with the lessons of the schoolgirl. With such governesses as Miss Maria and Miss Framm, and such masters as a large city can give, every day of study was one of rapid and conscious progress. School-hours had never been long or dull to Gerty, and this winter they were pleasanter than ever; and lessons often proved a refuge and relief from thoughts and duties that were rather trying sometimes.

For somehow, though by no means lonely, Gerty felt more alone at this time than she had ever done at school. The girls she used to look up to and lean upon—the girls who had been the “big ones” when she came first to Miss Martyn's—had almost all gone, and Gerty was finding herself forced, as it were, into the very foremost ranks, while the places behind her were being filled up by new recruits. She could not look for support for herself any longer; the time had come when it was her turn to give it to others; but it was this very necessity of self-dependence—this very responsibility for the safety of others—which made Gerty feel somewhat frightened and solitary. The position she held had been taken by no will of hers, but by force of the facts that from nature and circumstances she was older than her years, that she had been longer at school than most of

the other girls and knew the ways of the place well, and that, while the teachers all liked and respected her, the feeling of her companions towards her was stronger and kindlier still. This winter, with the exception of Nettie Cathcart and Emily Gordon, all the girls older than Gerty, whether boarders or day-scholars, were comparatively newcomers, and she found herself constantly appealed to as a person of authority and experience whose influence was very great in the school.

This state of things had come about gradually, but Gerty began to realize it now for the first time, and it filled her with no little dismay. And the most astonishing thing to herself was, that it turned out she really had advice to give and strong opinions of her own to enforce when there was need. It was strange enough to Gerty that she should be chosen leader of the school, but stranger still that she found herself capable of undertaking the post. For, you see, she had none of the makings of a strong-minded female in her; she had no love of power for its own sake,—her distrust of herself was far too great for that.

Then Gerty just now missed the sympathy and companionship of Emily Gordon, who rather gave her up this winter—not because she loved her less, but because she was entirely occupied with her little sister. To keep Minnie from evil seemed the sole business of Emily's life; she was occupied day and night with thoughts of it, and fears that she might not be successful weighed heavily on her mind. For the child took school-life in a way so different from Emily's, that the elder sister was utterly confounded. Minnie never grew home-sick, but maintained her belief that she was in a delightful place; the companionship of other girls made lessons, she said, as

amusing as games, and every evening like the night of a party. I think Emily would have had her keep company with nobody but herself and Gerty Stuart; but Minnie made "friends" with all, and "great friends" with a very large part of the school. She was laughing and prattling with some one at every leisure moment; and wherever a knot of girls had gathered for a confidential talk, she was sure to hie to the spot in innocent expectation of hearing something very delightful. Minnie had a belief in the niceness of everybody, which her sister, charitable as she had been where only herself was concerned, was inclined to regard as one of the most dangerous of weaknesses.

For the first time in her life Gerty found Emily Gordon selfish, for if the devoted sister found time to talk to her old friend at all, it was only about Minnie, and her disposition and temptations. Gerty never had an opportunity now of telling about Burnside, or getting a word of help or encouragement about her own charge; indeed, Emily had grown almost jealous of the attention bestowed on May, as if thinking it would have been better given to her precious little sister. She had hoped that Gerty would watch over Minnie, and keep her unharmed and happy, when she could not be with her; but then she did not wish that Minnie should associate with May, and actually begged that the two children should be carefully kept apart. Gerty was not willing to consent to this at first. She had been trying rather to throw May and Minnie together, taking advantage of the spirit of universal friendliness shown by the latter to procure some companionship for the unhappy little outcast; and hoping much that the fresh-hearted lively girl from the country might bring some healthy influence to bear on this neglected child of rich parents,

who was in as much need of moral reformation as any of the city Arabs the Gordon family were so much interested in. Minnie was older than May, Gerty protested, and ought to do good to rather than get harm from one who was altogether so babyish; besides, Minnie was so bright and sweet, it was difficult to believe that anything evil would stick to her. But Emily shook her head, and became tearful; that gleeful, unsuspecting disposition of Minnie's, which seemed to Gerty a safeguard, was in Emily's eyes her greatest danger; and she talked so pathetically of the trust confided to her by her parents, and the terrible grief they would feel if anything went wrong with their little daughter, that Gerty could do nothing but yield.

She was decidedly hurt that Emily should talk of the school as if it were a den of iniquity, and accuse her of putting an innocent defenceless child into the very worst part of it; but she kept Minnie henceforth apart from May, and so, of necessity, apart from herself also. Thus it was May who separated Gerty from the girls she liked the best, while her own companionship was not at all more pleasant or satisfying than it used to be. Gerty, naturally comparing her with Minnie Gordon, used to think how happy she would be if *her* girl were only half as nice as the one over whom Emily grieved and feared with such intense anxiety. Minnie was the most good-tempered child Gerty had ever seen; she seemed indeed to have no faults whatever; even her sister's constant watching and warnings (unreasonable enough, Gerty sometimes thought, to make *her* lose all patience) seldom brought a cloud over the sunny face, and never an impatient tone into the merry voice of the younger girl. Yet Minnie was docile and obedient to a marvel, ever yielding to Emily's wishes whenever she knew them, and rewarding her elder sister's anxious solicitude

by a very grateful and admiring love. Gerty would gaze sadly at the other guardian and pupil sometimes, and wonder whether it was most her fault or May's that the relations between them were so different. And for these sad thoughts Gerty found that the best remedy was occupation, and when they came over her she used to be glad she had not much time to indulge them, and willingly yielded to her lessons the attention that they claimed.

But it must not be supposed that Gerty was unhappy among her companions at this time, or that her real life was ever among her books rather than in the human interests around her. If her power as a leader was not sweet to her, the popularity that gave it certainly was. And though the Gordons held aloof from her, she had no lack of society or amusement; and Nettie Cathcart and she had grown so friendly, that she began to think there was only one girl in the school whom close companionship could not teach her to like. No, Gerty was not generally unhappy even then,—she had many things to make her glad,—only the consciousness of her influence had come upon her like the consciousness of a great burden. The time was to be when she could accept it calmly and use it bravely as a talent committed to her by God. But just now it seemed so hard for her to bear the weight! She had failed so completely in her efforts to aid one girl, how could she give help to the many who were beginning to look to her now? For the rush of new faith and hope with which Gerty had made her self-sacrifice in the beginning of the session was dying away, as the weeks passed on and brought no apparent change except for the worse in May. And Gerty, while doing all services that were needed for the child as gently as she could, became much troubled this winter by a haunting terror that was not altogether new. All through

the years they had been together she had never learned to like May; interest and pity had been the kindest feelings she had been able to cherish for her, but now a fear often came over Gerty that May would some day do or say what would kindle her cold distaste into passionate, irrepressible hatred. Perhaps it was more for her own sake than May's that Gerty looked forward to this with a sickening dread; for even now, except in the matters of dress and of lessons, all chances of helping May seemed to have gone from her for ever. She sometimes thought sadly that Nettie Cathcart managed her more effectually than she did, for Nettie had at least found a means of moving the child, though it was only by working on her fears.

"You'll certainly get yourself expelled some day soon," Nettie had said to May once; and from the silly fretful answer to her threat she got a hint which she made ample use of.

"It won't make any matter," retorted May; "they'll just send me to another school—it's all the same—it won't be any nastier in France or Switzerland."

"*Won't* it? Little do you know, my child. Ah! wait till I have time to tell you some things I know about French schools. Only wait, May!"

Seeing that she had produced an effect, Nettie took care soon to find time to fulfil her promise. Everything she had ever read or heard about the discomforts of foreign lands was all gathered together, and, supplemented largely by her own invention, expended on the description of a certain *pension* to which May was to be sent if she did not improve. At "the French school" it was bitterly cold—there were no carpets on the floors, no fires except in close stoves, never more than one blanket on any of the beds. The girls wore their out-of-door clothes in the house, and always carried

their muffs about with them, but all their efforts to get warm were of no avail. France was a warm country, did May say? Oh yes, in summer it was; the girls had constant headaches then, often sunstrokes, and occasionally cholera. Fainting-fits were considered nothing. The food, too—how would May like that? No butter, only oil; no meat, only salad; frogs perhaps might sometimes appear at dinner on high-days and holidays. The English girls that went to the French school plump became thin as scare-crows soon, and some were even known to die in consequence of their unhealthy diet. As for lessons—May thought they were hard at Miss Martyn's, did she? Ah! she would think differently when she went to the French school. Lessons began there at six in the morning, and went on till half-past eight at night. Walks?—no, there was no time given for anything of that sort. For meals a few minutes were allowed, of course, but very few. Did Miss Cathcart say work began at six o'clock? Yes, but she only meant classes in the schoolroom; the girls were busy preparing lessons for hours before that. And so on, and so on; skilfully piled-up horrors ever increasing as Nettie got more and more into the spirit of her narrative.

"You see, it is the best way to manage her," she would say to Gerty; "you see she always does what I want when I bring up the French school."

And Gerty, while regretting and disapproving of Nettie's methods, could not deny that they were generally successful.

She was an odd girl, this Nettie Cathcart—ever chattering, scoffing, gibing, and showing kindly feeling or even ordinary pleasantness to no other girl but Gerty. The Martyns liked her little—Miss Maria least of all—and yet there was no doubt that in many ways she did credit to the school, and they could not help being proud of her. For

she played and danced remarkably well, spoke French fluently with a beautiful accent, and was certainly a lady-like, pretty, and to some people very charming girl.

She was quite a grown-up young lady now, and had special immunities and privileges arranged for her this winter by her father. Nettie did little in the way of study now-a-days, and having many friends in the city she went out a great deal, and Gerty gathered from her talk that she was much admired. For the two talked a great deal together in their room at nights ; or rather Nettie talked to Gerty, for even if her companion would have cared to hear, Gerty could not have brought herself to tell of Burnside, or open up much of her own feelings to this girl who was so unlike her. But Nettie was very communicative about her affairs, her disagreements with her stepmother especially. Perhaps Gerty should not have listened to them—I do not know. She had certainly very strong ideas about the propriety of concealing family troubles, but very soon these all passed away, as far as Nettie was concerned, into a great pity, and a shuddering thought of what she herself would have been if her own mother were not living, her father the best of men, and her brothers the most satisfactory of boys. Indeed, Nettie's sketches of home-life were almost horrifying to Gerty, because she judged of them too much by what her own feelings in the same circumstances would have been, and did not make allowance for the satisfaction Nettie certainly got out of her own spiteful triumphs over her stepmother, and the intense amusement which any mistake of Mrs. Cathcart gave her. To Gerty it would have seemed no mitigation of the trials of her lot, that her father should often take his daughter's part against his wife in the domestic warfare which was constant, or that her stepmother's manner and

mental qualities were certainly below the usual level of those of well-bred ladies.

But Nettie was very different from Gerty in many ways, and she certainly deserved pity; nor was Gerty to be blamed if she learned to think too well of her. For the girl, who was certainly careless and flippant, and had long borne the character of being very unfeeling and ill-natured,—a girl who was said to laugh at everything and care for nothing,—certainly showed her best side alone in the bedroom with Gerty. She was the most amusing of chatterboxes, never dull, never unwilling to talk; and Gerty, who mourned over her own deficiency in words, profoundly admired the gifts of those who had plenty. Nettie was so pretty too, sometimes, and Gerty was very susceptible to the charms of beauty, and was always glad of an opportunity of acting as Miss Cathcart's maid, and helping to deck her out for a party. By some freak of fancy or instinct of what was becoming, her evening dress was always black or white; and, with flowers in her hair and ornaments glittering about her, the neat, bright-looking, rather pretty schoolgirl of the morning was transformed at night into a sparkling Spanish lady in dark trailing robes, or a lovely fairy in clouds of white.

Gerty once confessed to Nettie that she never liked her so well as when she was going out for a grand party; and the avowal was taken as a great compliment, though Gerty was not at all sure that it had been meant for one.

She would keep herself awake till late at night to hear Nettie's news when she came home, and as the young lady put off her pretty attire and unfastened all her rippling hair May Allardyce slept peacefully on, but Gerty sat up in bed eagerly listening to her talk. Nettie would tell of her flirtations then, and the compliments that had been paid her; more than once she spoke of some one whom her father

would like her to "accept," and often she declared vehemently that she *must* marry soon, if only to get out of Mrs. Cathcart's way. Once, when it was very late, and she had rattled on about many things for a long time, she suddenly told Gerty that it would be a great shame if she jilted her cousin Tom—poor Tom, who was so fond of her, and wrote such pathetic letters from the Australian bush. There was no doubt he was a dear good fellow; but then it would be too intolerable to be a poor man's wife, and that would certainly be the beginning and the end of her lot if she married Tom. Then Gerty for once interrupted Nettie, and spoke out her thoughts on the subject of matrimony.

"You ought to love the man you marry well enough to—live on bread and water with him," said she. "Or else—if you can't—you ought to be an old maid all your days!"

Nettie went off to bed laughing much at these theories; but the propounder thereof lay awake for long, meditating upon them herself.

Was Gerty the better or the worse, I wonder, of this constant intercourse with Nettie Cathcart? Was it well for her that, standing as she was on the very threshold of womanhood, she was thrown into familiar and friendly association with a girl whose ideal was so low and her life so vain? It is hard to say. After all, I think I must fall back on the old promise about all things working together for good to them that love God.


It is true that Emily Gordon would have been horrified had she heard the talk to which Gerty listened, not only interested and amused, but often positively admiring. Yet Gerty never was infected by Nettie's ideas; she regarded her altogether as a different being from herself—a girl to be wondered at and pitied, but not sympathized with. It must be confessed, however, that even when she thought Nettie

wrong she very seldom rebuked her ; but then Gerty always found so much to rebuke in herself that she had plenty to do in that way. As far as Nettie Cathcart was concerned, Gerty's chief anxiety was to keep herself right before her ; her greatest fear being that this sharp-sighted, sharp-tongued room-mate of hers might be able to pick out faults innumerable in her words and conduct. The text about the mote and the beam dwelt very much in her mind ; so that Nettie never had occasion to recommend it to her attention, though the verse was a favourite of Nettie's too, and one she was very fond of quoting.

So the winter days went rapidly and monotonously on, and the girls were already looking forward to the Christmas holidays in the very near future, when those things happened which, linking themselves to old never-to-be-forgotten memories, took their place among the greatest events of Gerty's school-life.

CHAPTER IV.

WALKING IN PERPLEXING PATHS.

 HE hourly bell at Miss Martyn's had just rung for four o'clock ; masters were passing out and in, girls changing rooms and classes ; it was a moment of bustle and hurrying to and fro. The large schoolroom was the chief centre of motion, for here, while the younger girls were taking away the books after Mr. Sherwood's class, which was just over, the elder ones were bringing theirs out, in preparation for the German master, who was coming. Mr. Sherwood had fairly gone ; Dr. Semmler was always a quarter of an hour late ; Mademoiselle, who had chaperoned the English class from three to four, had now hurried off to find out from the school-plan what her next duty was to be. Liberty reigned in the schoolroom, therefore, and the girls were not at all disposed to settle down very speedily to work again.

The third English class, which was rising from the long table in the schoolroom, was a large one in point of numbers ; but much above all other heads rose the brown one of Minnie Gordon, who was not only tall for her years, but backward in her studies. Minnie was talking and laughing with her companions now perfectly unrestrained, for Emily was in the midst of a two hours' private drawing-lesson in the dining-room. Nettie Cathcart, with her music on her arm, had paused at the door on her

way to the drawing-room piano, and was talking over a new song with Marion Campbell; three or four of the other girls had got together in a corner to read their German translation, which they were doing loudly and with much disputing and giggling.

Such was the state of things in the schoolroom when something—it was never known what—moved the small Meta Campbell to lean across the table and say, “Bow-wow-wow!” It was not said very loud, and had but little resemblance to the barking of a dog, but Minnie Gordon answered it immediately by a much more successful imitation of the mewling of a cat.

“Bow-wow-wow!” said Meta louder, then.

“Mee-a-ow, mee-a-a-ow,” repeated Minnie.

And as the cries of the two animals rose above the human speech around, the infection of folly spread, and a strange rivalry inspired the girls. Molly Smith stopped in the midst of her German reading to bleat with as much power and pathos as any sheep on a mountain-side; seldom has a lonely cow lowed more lustily than did Ellen Murray over Otto’s Grammar. Other cries, more or less successfully given, rose on all sides; even Marion Campbell, big girl and elder sister, instead of trying to still the general noise, augmented it powerfully by shrill cock-crowing. For one moment only did the most life-like and natural hen-voice join in the chorus, and then Nettie Cathcart thought it best to take herself off to the drawing-room. It was quite time, for Gerty Stuart, whose place she was to take at the piano there, was already on her way to the schoolroom and her German class.

“You will find yourself in a whole farmyard,” said Nettie, as the two crossed each other’s path in the lobby; and, indeed, the sounds of the mingled cries were borne along on

the air through the house. Gerty laughed and quickened her steps, with what intentions she scarcely knew herself; but, quick as she was, some one else was coming behind her faster, and hurrying with dreadful rustling garments towards the schoolroom. It was just at the drawingroom door Nettie Cathcart met Miss Maria, and seeing the determined look of vengeance on that awful countenance, guessed what was coming, and, being a prudent young woman, darted quickly and silently to the piano, and immediately began to play. Weber's "Invitation to the Dance" was sending its delicious music down the passage to mingle with the barnyard chorus when Gerty stood aside to let her governess pass.

The cries had all ceased before Miss Maria appeared in the schoolroom; perhaps it was because Mademoiselle was back again now in great anger and distress of mind; it could scarcely have been that some quick ears had heard above all the uproar the sound of rustling silk, which always foretold that terrible coming. But Miss Maria had heard too much for any amount of quietness to pacify her now; there was no hope for the culprits, Gerty knew perfectly when she came, in amusement and sympathy, to be present at the scene. There was the usual awe-inspiring pause and keen look all around, and then Miss Maria spoke in that clearly-cut cold language which is so peculiarly suitable to express dignified and distant displeasure.

“Qui a crié?”

No one answered—it was scarcely to be expected any one would; so the short terrible question went round, picking each one out by name, “Avez-vous crié, Mademoiselle ——?”

Then they all confessed,—some terribly shamefaced, others amused in the very midst of their terror, one, at least, suddenly overwhelmed with wonder and dismay.

Another rapid chilling sentence condemned them all to be written in Mademoiselle's note-book as receivers of twenty lines to be learned after prayers instead of going to bed. After that Miss Maria swept the younger girls out of the room, and departed, leaving the German class seated in silence round the table, and Mademoiselle again in her chair at the window solemnly awaiting Dr. Semmler. Only when the door was opened, the drawing-room one must have been opened too at the same time—by the music-master probably as he entered—for Miss Maria, turning sternly away from the criminals she had been sentencing in the schoolroom, let in for a moment the sound of the glad outbursts and joyous swing of the waltz Nettie was playing. And Ellen Murray's face just then was very unpleasant to behold.

Poor Minnie Gordon! Who can describe her heart-sinking and horror when she discovered the situation she was in? She did not know it at first; she was not familiar either with the French language or the fashions of the school, and though she left the room deeply repentant and humiliated, she had no idea that anything worse than a reproof and a bad mark had been given her. It was not long, however, before she was enlightened by her companions in guilt, who felt their own trouble much assuaged by the matter for wonder and even amusement her innocent ignorance gave them. But to poor Minnie it seemed that comfort would never come again in this world. The punishment was terrible to her, but the disgrace was infinitely worse; and she could not console herself with the thought that hers had been a slight fault, for she felt that it *must* be a terrible crime which had brought such terrible consequences! Preparing lessons or practising were alike impossible to her; from four to five she sat weeping at her desk in the

second-classroom, from five to six she sat weeping on the music-stool in the Blue Room. She would not go to tea; to all invitations given by her companions she only replied by shaking her head in dumb misery. They left her at last in the schoolroom, walking up and down, wringing her hands and sobbing.

Emily was scarcely less mournful, but she thought it right not to speak to her little sister; and leaving the poor child alone in her agony, she took her way slowly to the dining-room after Gerty Stuart. Gerty's face was looking so grave that she had little doubt of her sympathy as she laid her hand with an appealing touch on her friend's arm.

She was quite unprepared for the impatient, "Well, what?" with which Gerty turned round on her.

"Poor Minnie is punished by Miss Maria," said Emily, trying to steady her voice. "She has got twenty lines."

"She might have got worse," said Gerty.

"The sad thing is that Minnie deserved them," Emily went on sorrowfully. "She joined in making some great noise in the midst of lesson-hours this afternoon."

"She might have done worse," said Gerty.

Nothing more could Emily get from her then, but as they were taking their places at the tea-table Gerty added rapidly, and speaking low, "Your Minnie's isn't the only seat that will be empty to-night. May Allardyce is in bed for copying her French exercise, and then telling a lie about it."

No wonder that imitating a cat seemed a paltry fault in Gerty's eyes, while she was struggling hard against the force of her own ever-strengthening dislike for May. Why should any one distress themselves about imaginary crimes when there were such terribly real ones, not only in the world

but in Miss Martyn's school? But the over-scrupulous sister would not be comforted or convinced; with any other girl she would have been more merciful, but Minnie was so near herself that she felt it a duty to judge her severely.

The usual evening employments went on that night, leaving the culprits no time to learn any of their task before prayers, and giving but little opportunity for any sort of talk; but Emily and Gerty took advantage of every interval to come back to the subject which had taken possession of their minds.

"O Gerty, I wish I could think as you do," Emily whispered as they sat in the drawing-room before the reading began—"I wish I could think as you do; but I *know* it was wrong of Minnie. She must have known Miss Maria would be displeased; she could not have thought such a noise was proper at such a time."

"Do you suppose Minnie planned deliberately beforehand that she was to make a noise at four o'clock?" said Gerty.

Then Miss Martyn appeared, and there was reading; but just before prayers came another interval of a few minutes when it was possible to talk, and the low-toned discussion began again.

"My poor little sister in disgrace; it is almost as painful—just as painful as if it were myself."

"There are other girls in disgrace."

"Yes, that was what I always feared, that her love of company would lead her into harm. If she had only kept with you or me!"

"Don't you think there are girls to-night who have lines—much better than either you or me? I mean, do you really think us two the best in all the school?"

Emily at this coloured and bit her lip, and nothing more

was said until the culminating point of poor Minnie's disgrace was passed, and, unbidden good-night to by any one, she was driven with the rest of the evil-doers into the schoolroom to learn her lines. Then Emily, fairly weeping now, followed Gerty to her bedroom door, feeling not in the least angry at the snubs she had received, only longing more than ever for the sympathy of her friend.

"O Gerty! I can scarcely bear to go to my empty room. I have a letter from home to-night, and no one to hear it."

"Well, it's all a matter of taste, of course," said Gerty, rather fiercely; "but I would rather have an empty room than two girls in it too mean to speak to. That's what I've got to go to."

Emily, thoroughly crestfallen at last, went slowly and sadly away; but almost immediately Gerty came hurrying after her, and clasped her round the waist.

"Dear, I have been very unkind; forgive me! Only when I think of my great big troubles about May, yours about Minnie does seem such a little one. Emily, pray that I may grow to love that child; and, Emily, do be glad you have such a dear, good little sister. Do cheer her up and be kind to her when she comes to bed. Do, please, not scold her, for you don't know what a miserable thing it is to be—kicked when you're down, as the boys say."

Gerty had never outgrown the difficulty she used to have in expressing herself when her feelings grew very strong; and the effect of this difficulty was generally rather a curious one. In the struggle between intense earnestness and painful shyness, the girl who on ordinary occasions was so grave and well behaved, used to betake herself to slang—and that very often without the saving clause about "the boys." Emily Gordon, who had no brothers, and was naturally almost too gentle, was sometimes rather startled

by the strength of Gerty's language; and on this occasion she felt a little as if an accusation of brutality were being brought against her, when she was told not to kick her sister when she was down.

"But you forget, Gerty," said Emily, "that papa and mamma are not here, and Minnie is left to me. Who else is to tell her she is wrong if I don't? I can't bear to blame the child, but if I don't do it to-night she may break rules again, and the fault will be mine. It's no kindness to spare her this time."

"Really, Emily, you're talking very idiotically, it seems to me," said Gerty, feeling her indignation rising again. "Minnie's as wretched to-night as if she had been doing some dreadful thing. *She'll* not break rules again in a hurry, if she knows it—unless, Emily, you keep on nagging at her till she loses heart and thinks it doesn't matter what she does, and never expects to keep right at school."

Emily looked rather alarmed at this new possibility of danger for Minnie, and Gerty added as she turned away,—
"Well, I suppose I must go to my own room now, and the next thing will be pitching into Nettie Cathcart. Oh dear! oh dear! I wish I hadn't to, but there's no chance of getting off. *She'll* make me do it, *she'll* not leave me alone—she never can hold her tongue, that girl—"

"What has Nettie Cathcart done?" asked Emily, with rather languid curiosity.

"It's what she's *not* done," said Gerty.

What Nettie Cathcart was doing when Gerty entered the bedroom was—kneeling on the carpet in front of her drawers, choosing out various articles of dress, and packing them into a neat little travelling-box which generally accompanied her when she went to visit her friends. She

turned round to Gerty immediately, looking very bright and pretty. "I had a note from Jessie Marshall to-night," she said, "and I am to stay with her till Monday; I mean to be off to-morrow morning as early as I can. Grenadine or muslin, shall I take? Pink ribbons or crimson? Oh, by-the-by, do you remember if I had my blue cross on last night, or where I put it?"

On any other occasion Gerty would have had plenty of interest and assistance to give, but just now Nettie Cathcart's pretty looks and pretty dresses had no charms for her. "I don't know," she answered shortly; and repressing a sigh as she glanced at the heap covered with disordered blankets, which was all that was to be seen of May, she sat down at the dressing-table and began to unplait her hair. But, as Gerty had indeed foreseen, Nettie Cathcart was not to be put off by any coldness or silence. She rose and came where she could get a good view of Gerty's face, then said pleasantly,—

"Oh, what a rage you are in!" And as Gerty still said nothing, she added after a moment, "May I know what the matter is?"

"You ought to be in the schoolroom," said Gerty bluntly.

"Pourquoi donc, ma chérie? One's bedroom is much pleasanter at this time of night."

"Yes, but you *tucked* like a hen this afternoon," said Gerty, far too much troubled to think her own expression ridiculous.

"Ah! it was very wrong that—to *tuck* like a hen; very wrong! I don't wonder you are shocked, Gerty."

"I don't say it was very wrong," said Gerty, "but it was just the same thing as the others got twenty lines for. Perhaps Miss Maria would think it rather worse, as you're older."

"Then it's well she doesn't know,—isn't it? It would be such a pity to vex her."

"Oh, it's very easy to turn, and twist, and make fun of everything," said Gerty; "but nothing can alter the fact that you've done a very mean thing."

"What a bother it must be to have a tender conscience!" observed Nettie, with an air of candid gravity. "It must make life such a burden. Come, listen to reason, my dear, goody Gerty; that's to say, if your piety will let you. I suppose you think I ought to go to the schoolroom, and humbly confess that I tried to do a little cackling, and ask for twenty lines, and sit down with the children to learn them instead of staying here comfortably with you. Well, supposing I did, I should make rather a fool of myself, and do what was decidedly a bore. And do you think Miss Maria's wounded feelings would be soothed, or any of the girls at all helped? If it would take the punishment off that poor little Minnie, I might see some sense in your wishing me to go. How it does cry, poor child! A cheerful house Laverock Hall must be, if all the family have the same amount of tears always ready."

"Perhaps they have nothing to cry about when they are at home," said Gerty.

"They certainly find enough to cry about when they are here, then," returned Nettie.

"We used to give Emily plenty to cry about at first," said Gerty; "but that's not the question just now. You know I can't explain—you know I can't talk about things, but you are behaving very meanly all the same. You ought—you were in honour bound—to have told that you were in the row like the rest, and taken the consequences. There is not a girl among us all who won't think worse of you for this night's work."

"What do I care?" said Nettie lightly. "I can get on very well. I haven't any great wish to be liked by other girls. That's a compliment generally paid to stupid or ugly ones; it's no good sign of a woman's looks or cleverness when her own sex like her—I beg your pardon, Gerty, I forgot for the moment what a favourite you are. I really meant nothing personal to you."

"I didn't suppose you did," said Gerty calmly. "And now don't you think we had better say nothing more just now? We'll not make each other think differently, it seems."

"First tell me how you knew anything about me this afternoon. You weren't in the room. Ellen Murray told you, didn't she? I thought so. She was always a nice girl."

"It was almost a wonder she didn't tell Miss Maria," said Gerty.

"Now that I think of it," was the pert reply, "it certainly was. That would have been quite like her. But you bade her not, I suppose?"

"It was very easy for *me* to speak," said Gerty; "it was much harder for *her* who was mixed up in it—to see that because you had been selfish and dishonourable she mightn't be the same—just to pay you out. You ought to be very thankful to Ellen Murray."

"You've a high opinion of my good-nature, Gerty," said Nettie, still speaking in her cool, impudent voice, though her eyes were flashing. "How much more of this sort of thing do you expect me to stand? I don't know another girl who would have taken so much pharisaical nonsense from you or any one."

"You forced me into it," said Gerty, gravely and sadly. "I told you we had better stop."

"Well, don't let us stop in anger," said Nettie, somewhat touched by her tone. "What's the use of quarrelling and making ourselves disagreeable to each other, when it's so easy to be pleasant and enjoy ourselves? Why should twenty stupid lines stand between you and me? A mere baby's lesson—not worth caring about one way or other. Don't be sulky any more; give me a kiss, and be friends."

She came forward holding out her arms; but Gerty drew back, not angrily, only quietly and firmly. It was not easy for her, whose loyalty to her companions was one of the strongest articles of faith in her school creed, to forgive this girl who had deserted her fellows without a pang when the question became one of her own comfort and convenience. Once more it seemed as if the two were on their old terms again, and as if the few weeks of pleasant companionship had never been; all chance of Nettie gaining an influence over Gerty was gone; the only remembrance then of the liking which had grown up between them was in the sadness that largely mingled with the pity and contempt in Gerty's mind.

"I can't kiss you to-night," said she, rising; "I would rather not; perhaps to-morrow I'll feel differently."

"As you please," said Nettie coldly. "You can let me know when you've recovered your temper."

She went back to her drawers, but turned round again in great astonishment when she heard the door close, and found herself in the room alone. "What is that Quixotic creature going to be about now?" said Nettie to herself; but her bright wits could not throw very much light on the subject of Gerty's sudden departure.

The truth was, that the feeling had been growing stronger in Gerty's breast all evening that she ought in some way

to try and atone for the faults of the two girls who had been her friends, and whom she had been forced so sorely against her will to rebuke ; or, as she would have said, to pitch into. Emily Gordon, with the best intentions, had been cruel to her little sister ; Nettie Cathcart, laughing and sneering, had refused to bear her just portion of disgrace ; therefore it seemed to Gerty that she in her own person had become responsible for comforting Minnie, and vindicating the schoolgirl honour which had been set aside so lightly. To the last she had always clung to the hope that these duties would be performed by the girls to whom they properly belonged ; but now, as that was evidently not to be, there remained only one course open to Gerty. She could not stay in her bedroom to weep like Emily, or amuse herself like Nettie. She must go to the schoolroom to her friends in misfortune.

The girls in disgrace were all alone. Miss Framm was coming to hear their task at ten o'clock, and that would not be for half an hour yet ; but the mirth with which most of the prisoners had begun their time of confinement was passing away now from the very boldest. There was still plenty of noise, but the laughter was rather forced and the joking somewhat bitter.

"Wouldn't you like to go to the dining-room and see what they are having for supper?" said Molly Smith. "I don't see why governesses should get supper and not girls. I'm dreadfully hungry."

"You always are," said Ellen Murray. "No; I'd rather go and pull Nettie Cathcart out of bed."

"Nettie will never learn lines," said Marion Campbell. "Meta! don't go to sleep, child. Come, say, 'Elle était jeune, elle était belle.' Nettie Cathcart would refuse to learn lines if she got them ; she would leave the school

rather. That would be the most dignified thing for a grand lady like her to do. ‘Elle était jeune, elle était belle ; Son front—’”

“She’d hate to go home to her stepmother !” said Ellen. “That would be a better punishment than lines—and serve her right for a nasty little serpent as she is. If it weren’t for Gerty, I would have gone straight to Miss Maria—”

“Oh, do be quiet, please !” said Isabel Maitland. “I can’t learn anything if you talk straight on.”

Her piteous tone moved some compassion in the breasts of the others ; and Marion Campbell asked, “Why, what did you do, Miss Maitland ?”

“I buzzed a very little,” said Isabel, with a quiver in her voice that might have come from either distress or amusement.

The shout of laughter which followed this confession was too full of anger against Miss Maria and pity for Isabel to be very merry ; and it was in the midst of this that the door opened. There was a sudden silence of horror, lest Miss Maria, hearing the noise, might have come to double their punishment ; but the uproar burst forth again when Gerty Stuart appeared, rather in dishabille, but looking perfectly composed.

It was Ellen Murray who at last raised her voice to still the tumult, asking her companions very angrily if they wished to call in Miss Maria, and so land Gerty Stuart in the same trouble they were in themselves.

“It doesn’t matter,” said Gerty, smiling ; “it’s all right. How are you getting on ?”

As she refastened her brooch and pushed back her hair which had fallen half unplaited over her shoulders, the others looked at her in some perplexity, wondering at her coolness ; not because they had ever had any doubts about

her bravery, but because it seemed strange that such a good girl should break rules, and do it so deliberately. For leaving the bedroom after prayers was a punishable offence at Miss Martyn's school. But, of course, the girls were very glad to see Gerty, and after the first astonishment was over made haste to show her their task, and tell her how simple the new Mademoiselle had been in giving them poetry to learn, and such short lines. Fancy Miss Maria doing a stupid thing like that! The most difficult piece of prose she could find was what she prescribed for a punishment lesson; and she was not satisfied with the bare twenty lines, but expected her victim to learn on till the next full stop came.

"And now we must really set to work," said Marion when the explanations were done. "It was very good of you to come and see us, dear. But you had better go off to bed now; it makes me nervous to have you stay here, in case you may be caught."

"She'll be as safe twenty minutes after this; and as she *is* here at any rate, she'd better see what she can do for that creature;" and as Ellen Murray spoke, she pointed her thumb over her shoulder at the figure of Minnie Gordon seated on the floor in an attitude of woe. Minnie had her head bent and her face buried in her handkerchief, but when Gerty came near to her and said her name she looked up with a sudden start, and stretched out both her hands. She got hold of Gerty's dress and kissed it passionately. "Oh, how kind you are! I thought you would never speak to me any more!"

"What made you think anything so stupid?" said Gerty, sitting down beside her on the floor. "That's not the way we treat our friends at Miss Martyn's. How are you getting on with your lines? They're quite pretty, I think,

and so easy—'Elle était jeune, elle était belle ; Son front, même au milieu des pleurs.' That's right, isn't it? And Elle means La poésie. How much do you know of it?"

Minnie's look of astonishment during this cheerful talk of Gerty's was beyond description, but at the last question she shook her head hopelessly, and murmuring, "I don't know any," again began to cry.

"Oh, but you mustn't go on that way, when I've come all the way from my own room to see you," said Gerty. "Do stop crying ; here's my dry handkerchief to rub up your eyes with. Now, then, I'm going to show you how to learn lines. They're not such dreadful things, after all."

"O Gerty ! O Gerty ! Emily is so sorry. And what ever will papa and mamma do when they know ?"

"I should think they would laugh," said Gerty ; "at least my father and mother would, I know. Do you know I've a brother that cares to hear nothing at all about school except about the punishments and the lines? I have to write them all. I had a letter from him the other day—'My dear Gerty, Freddy caught a trout, and I ate it, bones and all. If there have been any more rows at school, you may write me about them. Miss Maria is a very nice woman. Your affectionate brother.' That was all the letter. Don't you think it's very kind of you and the rest to give me something to write to Robbie about?"

Minnie laughed, as it was hoped she would ; and being a good deal comforted by Gerty's clean, dry handkerchief, suffered herself to be coaxed to come and sit at the table near the light, that she might try to learn her poetry. As the two girls found places for themselves between Isabel Maitland and Meta Campbell, Minnie asked in a whisper, "Gerty, did you ever get a punishment lesson?"—then seeing the look of wonder on her companion's face, she

added quickly, "No, of course you never did. I beg your pardon."

Gerty burst out laughing, though there was a look in her eyes that was rather sad than mirthful. "Often and often," she said; "forty lines sometimes. Why, I've got twenty to-night, Minnie."

"Oh! what for?"

"For coming here," answered Gerty composedly. "It's against rules to leave your room after bed-time."

There was an immediate outcry among the other girls, who, attracted by her laughter, had been listening to what Gerty was saying. She was told she did not really mean it; she was exhorted to go to bed and not make a fool of herself; she was begged not to vex her friends by putting herself in trouble; she was asked pathetically if she imagined that any one would tell on her.

To all this Gerty listened unmoved; she had expected this opposition, and was perfectly ready for it.

"I wished to come to you," she said whenever her voice could be heard, "and I made up my mind to learn my lines for that. If I break a rule like that, it is only fair I should pay forfeit. But if I'm to be able to do it, you must be quiet and let me work hard till ten o'clock. Now, Minnie, this is the only way. Gather all your mind up, and think of nothing but your lines. Make sure of four at a time—take hold of them, as if your mind had hands, and stretched them out, and took a good firm grip. Hold them fast, and nail them into your head. When they are firm there, go on to the next. Think of nothing and listen to nothing but your work. Now, then."

Gerty possessed herself of a book, like the rest, and then for a while silence reigned; only broken occasionally by some girl murmuring a line or two of her task, and the

rebuke of her neighbour, who requested her not to disturb other people.

Ten o'clock brought both Miss Framm and Mademoiselle to the schoolroom, but happily not Miss Maria, that most inexorable of task-mistresses. Miss Framm, though severe enough sometimes, knew when to be merciful; so Gerty with her train of new-comers and younger girls went over to her immediately. And though Isabel Maitland stammered and stuck very often in her task, she got never a word of blame; and poor little Meta, who did not know much French, was allowed to go off to bed after scarcely a pretence of repeating the poetry; while Minnie Gordon's tearful face served as explanation and excuse for her very ill-learned lesson. Miss Framm was a wise woman, with even more discrimination than Miss Maria, for she had both humour and tenderness in her composition; and she knew very well who were the girls that had been most punished that night. Marion Campbell needed all the fluency with which she recited what to her were very easy lines, to take her safely out of Miss Framm's hands.

The last of all her batch was Gerty, who had hung behind till the girls she was anxious about had all been given over to the governess she trusted most. About herself she was not at all anxious. Thanks to long practice in the seizing and nailing operation she had described, her lesson was safely fixed in her head, and she came forward with it quite calmly when her turn came. But before she had begun to speak an idea seemed to strike Miss Framm, and she asked, "How have you lines to-night?"

"I came visiting. I was obliged to stay and learn lines for that, wasn't I?"

"Go on then, Gertrude."

Miss Framm was a wise woman, as I said before, and

she had had opportunities of studying girl-nature for many years, and this particular girl's for more than three. And to-night she had not failed to notice how Minnie Gordon held her friend's dress tight all the time she was tremblingly repeating her task, or how eagerly Gerty was following the poor little girl's tearful, ill-pronounced words. So Miss Framm asked no more questions, and the lines were all said, and the girls dismissed to their bedrooms, where they had to suffer the last of their punishment by going to bed in the dark. It is scarcely necessary to say that imitating the cries of animals never became a fashionable amusement at Miss Martyn's school.

But the chief result of that night's work was one which Gerty had certainly neither sought nor anticipated,—the increase of her own popularity. Such a thing as she had done had never been done before; and its unselfish bravery, whether wise or not, moved the admiration of every schoolgirl heart.

Once, long ago, a certain Kate Mackenzie had sat a whole evening in the Blue Room helping a little girl to learn her lines; but that had been done out of superior and patronizing kindness, and had not compromised her at all: while Gerty had come into the very midst of her companions in disgrace, aiding some, lecturing no one, sharing their punishment herself. In the bedrooms, while the girls talked over the "awful niceness" of Gerty Stuart, the two cases were compared, and the fact that Kate Mackenzie had broken no rule was brought up to prove how immensely inferior her merit had been. Perhaps this schoolgirl morality would have seemed rather odd to some people, but after all I doubt if there was anything far wrong in the principle of it. Certainly Gerty was also admired for the way in which she did honour to the laws by voluntarily

paying the penalty when she broke them. Her companions had urged her not to do it, but they respected her all the more for resisting their entreaties; her firm conscientiousness in the matter seemed to them chivalrous when joined with the loving, generous sympathy which would not allow her to rest quietly while her friends were in trouble.

Of all the girls with whom Gerty had cast in her lot that night, Minnie Gordon and Isabel Maitland carried away the most loving remembrances of her. Minnie's gratitude was gushing and outspoken then and afterwards, but Gerty never understood the place she took from henceforth in the estimation of the other new girl.

Isabel Maitland was considered decidedly queer, for she took fits of talk and silence, would be very companionable at some times, and at others walk about heeding no one; and while she did only fairly well in most of her classes, she would wake up into surprising brightness when the lesson was history or English poetry. Isabel gave agreeable variety to her exercise-books by writing original verses and stories here and there; and of course the other girls got hold of these, and made fun of the authoress, who was very much ashamed of herself; but at the very next leisure moment she would be scribbling again, with pathetic attempts at secrecy. While her powers of observing other things were small, she had a perfect mania for studying character; and Gerty's conduct that night seemed to her a precious revelation of nobleness. At last she had found a heroine in real life, and she made haste to transfer her to fiction. During the Christmas holidays, Isabel Maitland read aloud to her younger sisters a thrilling manuscript tale of a Huguenot lady who left her secure refuge in England, and went back to her own country to share the fate of a sister imprisoned there for conscience' sake; and she explained to Loulou

and Elly that Mademoiselle Marguerite was very much like a girl she knew at school, whose name was Gerty Stuart.

But though Isabel Maitland's good-night kiss seemed to her unusually affectionate that night, Gerty had of course no idea of the romance that was already being woven about her; and if she had, I doubt not she would have been much more amused than flattered. She parted from Isabel, advising her not to tumble over any chairs in her dark room; and she unloosed herself from Minnie Gordon's embraces and went off to her own chamber, which was all in blackness, of course, like the rest.

"Well, Gerty," said Nettie's voice, greeting her immediately, "you're a nice young woman, staying out visiting till this time of night! A good girl is the one for getting into mischief thoroughly. I would have had the gas lighted and been enjoying myself now, if I could have made up my mind to be as wicked as you."

"Oh, I know you well," said Gerty, laughing. "It wasn't safe to light the gas when you didn't know where I was, or *who* might be going about the lobbies and into the bedrooms to-night."

Somehow Gerty was feeling it much easier to forgive Nettie now, and she spoke quite pleasantly.

"And what have you been about? Comforting Emily in her affliction, and trying to persuade her that it's not such a very long way her sister's gone on the road to ruin?"

"I was in the schoolroom," said Gerty, beginning to undress herself quickly.

"Well, that *was* impudence!" and Nettie's interest and curiosity moved her to sit up in bed. "And you scuttled off into the second-classroom when you heard Miss Maria coming? Now, my lady, I have you. You're a breaker

of rules and an audacious, punishable person, and I'll do as I please as well as you. The very next night I'll keep the gas lighted till midnight, and if you dare to interfere—"

Gerty would not have been human if she had refrained from smiling to herself in the dark as she answered quietly, "I'll not interfere—if you learn your lines for it, and say them."


"Do you mean to say you did that to-night?"

"Yes, I did."

The other girl lay back on her pillow and laughed. She did not speak for a little, but when she did she acknowledged her defeat gracefully enough. "There seems no possibility of catching you, Gerty!"

CHAPTER V.

THE TRIAL GERTY HAD FEARED.

HE next day was one that Gerty had been looking forward to for more than a week, for it was “going-out Saturday,” and she was to spend the forenoon at the house of an old aunt,—and there she was to meet Freddy!

She went about in the early morning smiling to herself, and scarcely able to keep from singing; but she did her best to control her excitement, and set herself firmly to find employment till eleven o'clock. Nettie Cathcart claimed attention first, in her bustle of preparation for going off to Mrs. Marshall's; and Gerty brushed her jacket, and strapped up her box, and discussed with her the loss of the blue cross, whose disappearance seemed to affect its owner more than most things did. In vain Gerty tried to convince her that she would likely find it at Mrs. Marshall's or some other friend's where she had been visiting lately; and that, after all, if it *had* been dropped while she was out walking and so was lost for ever, Nettie, who had so many ornaments, all her own mother's jewels, might well afford the loss of one little trinket which, though pretty enough, was not at all valuable. Perhaps Nettie was vexed at her own unusual carelessness; for she was one of the neatest-fingered, tidiest of girls, who was scarcely ever known to mislay anything, and always kept her

drawers in the most exquisite order. She turned them all ruthlessly outside in and upside down this morning, rather to the amazement of Gerty, who, knowing how well she kept the rule about a place for everything and everything in its place, thought it rather funny to see Nettie Cathcart hunting for her cross in the drawer where she kept her underclothing, just as May Allardyce or any other disorderly girl would have done. "It can't be there among your white things, surely, Nettie!"

"I don't expect it is; but all things are possible in this world, and if searching will get it I'll have my cross."

She made good her word, and looked in every nook and corner of her premises, but all in vain; and she went off at last in a flurry of annoyance, not to say regular ill-humour. "I'm not Isabel Maitland, to forget where I lay my things," she said sharply, in answer to Gerty's repeated attempts at consolation; "I know I had it all safe the other night. I believe the truth is some one has taken it."

Gerty was indignant, for the housemaid was a great favourite and had been long in the school; so it was shocking to think of the slightest doubt being cast on her honesty. It was characteristic of Gerty that she never dreamt for a moment that Nettie's suspicions could glance at any of her companions; it was only for Jane's sake she felt offended, and was inclined to think Miss Cathcart's pettish words mean enough to be classed with her last night's actions. However, afterwards, she reflected that Nettie was very much vexed, and very probably, therefore, did not notice what she was saying; and with a charitable hope that the cross might be found somewhere and somehow soon, Gerty put the matter out of her mind altogether, and went to write her home-letter in the first-classroom.

The Gordons were there sitting very close together.

talking in low tones about Laverock Hall, and Edie and Blanche, their pet animals and the cottage children. Gerty paid no heed to them; they did not need her to come between them now, the bond of their sisterhood was drawn closer again after last night's trouble. At first the two had been rather embarrassed and uncomfortable, for Minnie had evidently risen with the idea that after her sins it behoved her to wear sackcloth and ashes for a time; while Emily, who had humbly taken her friend's words to heart, made the most pathetic attempts to be not only unusually loving but brightly cheerful with her little sister. The other girls had found not a little amusement that morning in watching how unsuccessful Minnie was in trying to keep down her own joyous spirits, and how, when Emily saw her strive hard not to laugh when they made jokes, *she* would seem to find them very funny, and even make a few mild jests herself. Gerty found Marion Campbell just after breakfast in agonies of laughter half-way between the diningroom and the schoolroom, and when she stopped to hear the reason why, she was begged, if she had any influence with Emily Gordon, to persuade her never to make a pun again, as the consequences would certainly be fatal to some of her companions.

Gerty passed on, laughing a little, but she had been deeply touched by Emily's conduct, and in her heart she could not help envying this girl to whom Nature seemed to have given every good and lovable quality except a sense of the ludicrous. She sometimes wondered if original sin had found any abode in the peaceful country-home where the Gordons had been born and bred, for their very weaknesses leant to virtue's side; and Gerty was now inclined to think that the sisters made serious faults out of trifles, because they had really nothing else to reproach

themselves with. One like herself, whose feelings and passions were so strong, and who dreaded the powers of evil within her as a force over which she held but the slightest control, and which might break forth at any time in the most unexpected and terrible ways, might well think lightly of a piece of childish folly over which purer, sweeter spirits had time to meditate and mourn.

It was very easy for some people to be good and happy, was the conclusion Gerty had come to then in the early morning, and she was not likely to change her mind now when she found that all the awkwardness of their repentant and forgiving feelings had passed away from the sisters; the two were their natural selves once more—Emily talking gently and gravely as usual, and Minnie's rippling laughter constantly interrupting her speech.

That Gerty herself was not of that race of good and happy beings to which the Gordons belonged, she got a new and startling proof, when, just as she was finishing her letter, Mrs. Martyn came to seek her, bringing May ready equipped for going out. May also was to spend the forenoon with an aunt, and as it had turned out that their ways lay in the same direction, she and Gerty were to drive together; which was a very natural and proper arrangement, of course, yet the news of it gave Gerty's temper a shock which rather frightened herself. She was astonished to find what a pleasure it had been to think that she would not see May again till the afternoon, for the thought of even the few minutes in the cab alone with her seemed almost intolerable. Nobody almost ever wanted May to visit them; why should it happen then that her aunt chose to invite her the very same day, and that she lived in the very same street as Gerty's relative did? Gerty was inclined to be indignant at Mrs. Martyn for allowing May

to go at all ; Miss Maria would surely not approve of her yesterday's trespasses being forgotten so soon. May herself had a scared, restless look, as if conscious that she ought to be detained. Her silent terror moved Gerty quite as much to contempt as pity ; and, dressed out as she was in all her best, she only showed more plainly what a pinched, delicate-faced creature she was. It had been easier to bear with May when she was really rather a pretty little girl, as she used to be. Oh, it was very dreadful to be so ill-tempered as Gerty was ! Emily and Minnie certainly never had such feelings.

The two girls drove away from Miss Martyn's together in silence : Gerty sitting back in the cab and thinking her own mingled thoughts of remorse and pleasure, of May and Freddy ; while her companion kept her face away from her all the time, and stared out of the window.

"Good-bye, May. Be sure to be ready when I call for you at four," said Gerty as they parted ; and two minutes afterwards she had forgotten there was such a person as May in the world, while she clung round her own Freddy's neck, almost weeping with delight.

Oh, the joy of walking along the finest street in the city with plenty of time to look at the shops, and your brother as escort and companion ! How dearly loved is an old aunt who, after dispensing a dainty dinner to her young relatives, falls asleep in an arm-chair and leaves them to talk unrestrained,—only waking up to present each with half-a-sovereign before they go away ! Such delights did Gerty taste that day with great happiness and gratitude, the glow of which was still all about her when Master Fred put her into a cab again, and was with difficulty persuaded that something dreadful would be done to him if he drove with his sister and her companion to Miss Martyn's.

May, limp and peevish-looking as ever, was a poor exchange for the schoolboy-brother and his merry chatter, and the first chill of the atmosphere she was returning to struck on Gerty's heart as she took her place beside her. Oh no! May had not enjoyed herself. Aunt Janet was cross, and the children were not at all nice, and she was tired and cold. Gerty sighed, and her happy mood passed altogether away. She leant back and meditated, and May sat beside her and shivered, and again the two girls drove on in silence.

They did not speak even when they reached Miss Martyn's door. The driver went up the steps to ring the bell, and while Gerty was all ready to jump out May was still huddled up in her corner, when that happened which Gerty told her schoolfellows after was "nearer an accident than anything she had ever been in before."

The horse, either taking a sudden fright at something, or moved by a desire to leave its master behind and so get rid of him altogether, started off, and went tearing wildly down the street. Gerty sat perfectly calm and steady; she did not know whether the danger might be great or small; I think her first fear was of mischief happening to any who might be walking, rather than to herself and May.

But, if it were so, this was only a darting thought; she had no time for more, as all her wits were occupied in attending to the child by her side. May rose with a wild shriek and threw herself towards the open window, as if she would try to spring out. Gerty had to catch and hold her back with all her strength. "May—May! sit down, May! are you mad?" said Gerty, scarcely hearing her own voice amidst May's screams.

"Let me out! We'll all be killed! It's because of me! I took Miss Catheart's cross! I've got it on just now!"

The unhappy child did indeed seem as if she were out of her senses as she struggled wildly in Gerty's arms, crying in piercing entreaty, "Let me out—let me out!" Whether it was merely that she thought getting out of the cab by any means was her only chance of safety, or whether she might also have had some Jonah-like idea that by flinging herself on the worse peril she might deliver her companion, was never distinctly known. Let us give May Allardyce the benefit of the doubt, as Gerty always did.

Long as it all seemed to the girls, it really only lasted a very short time. Happily a cab-stand was near, and the horse was speedily stopped by some of the men. But May was almost in hysterics before she and Gerty again reached Miss Martyn's door.

Mrs. Martyn received them full of anxiety and dismay, and brought them hastily into the drawing-room, as being the nearest room where there was a sofa to get May down upon. The child's state had become really alarming, and no assurances of safety could still her cries. In vain Mrs. Martyn strove to soothe and coax with kindly words; in vain Miss Martyn brought water, and wine, and sal-volatile; May could not be persuaded either to hear or swallow anything from them. And when Mrs. Martyn would have unloosed her jacket and dress, her screams redoubled, and, with both hands clasping the fastenings at her neck, she writhed and struggled as if she were really going into convulsions. It was a relief, as giving some clue to what she might possibly want, when she began to call for Gerty, though whether she knew in the least what she was saying was very doubtful to the good ladies. They stood back then and beckoned to Gerty, who had been looking on with a very white grave face. She came forward immediately, and kneeling on the floor beside the sofa, put her arms

round the poor little shaking form. "My poor May!" she said, in a voice full of pity and tenderness; "my poor May!" And as Gerty held May so, the crying gradually became less violent, calming down into weary sobbing, which only grew passionate again when Mrs. Martyn or her daughter came near.

"Nobody but Gerty! Nobody but Gerty!"

"Perhaps if we were alone altogether it would be better," said Gerty at last; and Mrs. Martyn and Miss Martyn went away. Afterwards she could not but be amused and horrified when she remembered how coolly she had ordered the august ladies out of their own drawing-room, and how meekly they had obeyed; but at the time she was thinking of no one but May.

"It's only Gerty now, dear," she said when the door had closed.

"Take it off!" gasped May. "It's choking me!"

Then Gerty unfastened May's jacket, and took Nettie Cathcart's cross from her neck. She wrapped it up in its velvet ribbon, and put it away in her own pocket—the very calmness of her actions seeming to quiet May. Then she sat down on the sofa herself, and gathering the child up in her arms, she pillowed the disordered head in her lap.

"Hush, hush, my poor little girl—my dear little girl."

When all had been quiet for a while, Mrs. Martyn peeped softly in at the door, and saw the two girls on the sofa together, Gerty supporting May, who lay as if asleep, though she was sighing and sobbing still. Gerty smiled, but was evidently afraid either to speak or move, and the old lady felt she could do nothing but leave them alone again.

Thus it was that Gerty's presentiment was fulfilled, and she found out that May had done a thing which to her

honest, unflinching eyes seemed infinitely worse than any schoolgirl fault which had ever come to her knowledge before. Her presentiment had been fulfilled, but not the accompanying horror: the moment of Gerty's dreaded trial God too had foreseen, and chosen it to grant her heart's wish and her prayer; for as she knelt beside the conscience-stricken, terrified child a new spring of love welled up in her heart, whose natural outcome it was when she took May in her arms.

And now, when Gerty sat alone watching over the guilty little girl, it was her own sins, not May's, she looked at with horror and with hatred. She told herself that she had never done her part to Ada's baby; she had been hard; she had been cold; she had ever held her at a distance; the promise she had made by a dying bed had been kept in the letter and not in the spirit. When first she tried to help and take charge of May, it had seemed as if all her powers of making fun and pleasure for other girls had gone from her for ever; she did not wish to love or be loved by any other little friend. She had been selfish then in her grief, and it was impossible that the child could have learned to cling to and trust a creature who had very few words at all, and never any tender ones. And when God took away the first bitterness of Gerty's sorrow, and she turned from the little grave growing green in the sweet still cemetery back to Miss Martyn's school, it had never been to May that she had given her best; for her she had only patience, and advice, and attention; all her love, and mirth, and liking had gone to others.

For others, too, she had reserved her tenderness of judgment, making excuses for their faults as she never had done for May's. Did she not continually remind herself and her companions that Meta Campbell was but a child, and that

her babyish follies ought to be lightly dealt with? Yet May had come to school a year younger than the privileged pet of the present era, and May's weakness and helplessness had always provoked anger rather than pity. Gerty was ever anxious too that it should be remembered how delicate Emily Gordon was, and would trace her friend's occasional fits of low spirits back to a walk which had been very long, or a course of study which had been harder than usual; but she had seldom any thought that May's complaints about weary limbs, "nasty, nasty" lessons, food she was not hungry for, and early rising, could have any foundation in the state of her health. Gerty had palliated Nettie Cathcart's defects of character to herself by attributing them to the circumstances of her dreary, comfortless position at home; but it could not be said that she had ever considered May's situation much, though that was little better than Nettie's, for her mother was too entirely devoted to gaiety to have time or thought to spare for her children, and her father's paternal feelings were all centred in his little son.

Such were Gerty's thoughts. And yet there was not another girl in all the school who would not have said that she had kept her promise nobly, holding to it with pathetic patience even in the stupor of her first great grief; standing fast by May, in spite of all ingratitude, with a heroism which won admiration even from those who could not understand its motives, and the memory of which was borne by some of her friends through all their lives as a precious proof of the power of Christianity.

Are we to say, then, that Gerty's ideas were false, her self-reproach morbid, her grief unnecessary? God forbid! Every word that she said in blame of her conduct as she sat alone in judgment on herself was doubtless true, for the Lord's commandment is exceeding broad: the standard we have

to measure ourselves by is the perfection of our heavenly Father.

In such times of conviction of sin and distrust of self there is but one sight that can bring comfort ; and this sight was given to Gerty now, who, lifting up her sad and guilty eyes, beheld the cross of Jesus Christ. Thank God, she had seen before that thorn-crowned head, those pierced hands ; but perhaps never with such a full understanding that in the shadow of her Saviour's cross was the one resting-place for her in all the world. She crept very near it, and her grief was stilled ; under the blessed, wounded feet her repentance blossomed forth into new faith, and hope, and love. Burnside itself had never given such joy as Gerty's was now.

Long time she sat in the drawing-room alone, and it did not seem long to her. The other girls came to her more than once, but she motioned them away, for May seemed to sleep peacefully as time went on, and Gerty would not have her disturbed. "You must not waken my baby," she said to them ; and for love of her they went out as softly as they could, and had neither dancing nor riotous games in the schoolroom that night. And perhaps Gerty's words recalled an almost forgotten name, and her absence unloosed the conversation on a subject that scarcely ever was mentioned before her, while the danger that had come near two of the schoolgirls solemnized the rest unusually, for they gathered about the fire and talked of her who had been of all others the child of the school, and who only left Miss Martyn's when the golden gates of heaven opened to let her in. They talked of her under their breath and not without tears ; the girls who had played with, and scolded, and petted her, who had stood by her in her last illness and received the parting message of love from her ; and the

girls to whom Ada was the unknown child who had died before they came to Miss Martyn's, a creature whom they imagined half-angel and half-fairy, whose memory shed a sweet and tender radiance still about the places where she had been. But to one and all of these schoolgirl-hearts the story of the little one who had loved her friends so well and left them so willingly to go to Jesus, came home with a more powerful impression than any sermon they had ever heard. The path to heaven had looked very near and very distinct to Miss Martyn's girls, since a child from the very midst of them had risen and gone up the shining way. When Christ came to take Ada to Himself the school had all heard His voice, and that solemn time was never quite forgotten. There were some who remembered it now with gladness, for He had bidden them also be ready, and they had heeded what He said.

CHAPTER VI.

A TIME OF SUSPENSE.



MAY had a very restless night, tossing and moaning in her sleep, and waking up now and then with a start and a cry. Gerty was always ready to speak to and soothe her, and probably, on the whole, got a good deal less sleep than the child. But she was not disposed to lay much weight on this fact when morning came, and she went down to breakfast alone, feeling a little amused, as she often was in those days, over the new Gerty, who could take upon herself the responsibility of bidding her companion stay in bed, in full security that her word was enough to persuade the authorities of the school that such a measure was judicious.

"I don't think that child has been looking well for a long time," said Mrs. Martyn, when Gerty told her May had not risen (Miss Maria was not at breakfast). "I think I'll have the doctor to see her to-morrow; and whether her mother takes her home or not, I can't help it; but I don't think she should be allowed to look at a lesson till after Christmas."

Gerty, knowing that Miss Maria always yielded to her mother's opinions on the matter of health, would have been glad at the prospect of no lessons for May, had it not occurred to her that the poor child's stay at school might come to a sudden and disgraceful end before many days

were over. What was to be the outcome of the present matter she could not see, but was content to leave it with One who did, while she went through her own part as faithfully as she could. Only she felt sad and embarrassed when she heard May's future discussed by those who knew so little of her present circumstances, and was relieved when Mrs. Martyn allowed her to return to the bedroom to see if the child had been able to take any breakfast.

"I may stay from church with her, mayn't I?" were Gerty's first words when Mrs. Martyn followed her in a few minutes. Gerty was sitting on the bed with the tray in her lap, trying to coax May to take her tea and toast. May herself was lying back on the pillows, her face pale and her eyelids swollen with yesterday's crying; the usual listless, dejected expression on her face changed into one of restless, nervous terror. Mrs. Martyn, looking at her in some trouble and anxiety, wondered whether it would not be better to send for the doctor that very day, and, I believe, secretly vowed that May should have no lessons till spring. She said nothing of this to May, however,—only ransacked her kind old brains to think of something that might tempt her to eat; but to each and all of Mrs. Martyn's proposals May returned a negative that grew ever more fretful, till at last her answers ended in a burst of tears as she hid her face in the pillow.

"Well, well, my dear; we'll leave Gerty to stay with you, and you must just try to get a sleep and forget all about yesterday," said Mrs. Martyn, as she departed and beckoned Gerty to follow and speak to her outside the door. "I really don't think she's looking well at all," she said when the two were alone; "and she's scarcely tasted a mouthful of breakfast. I'll tell Jane to bring her up a little soup about twelve o'clock, and I think she'd better

just lie still till she feels inclined to get up herself. And if you want anything, my dear, be sure just to ring for it. Indeed, I don't like leaving you alone. I'm sure, if it were any good I would willingly stay with her myself, but you see she won't let me near her."

"She's accustomed to me," said Gerty, not knowing what else to say.

"Yes, that's it," said the old lady warmly. "And I'm sure you're a dear, kind girl to take so much trouble with her. She's a queer little ill-brought-up thing; but she's got a terrible fright, and we must have patience and not cross her to-day. What you have to thank your good mother for, Gertrude! To think of the difference between that poor child and you! Miss Maria herself was just saying, when we were talking of the cab running off, 'No need to ask how Gerty behaved; I'm quite sure *she* did bravely.'"

Gerty flushed and looked pleased, for though good Mrs. Martyn's praises did not count for much in the estimation of the schoolgirls, a compliment from Miss Maria was too rare a thing not to be valued highly.

"I don't think I had time to think how I ought to behave," said Gerty. But even while she spoke May's frightened, fretful voice was heard calling her name, and after another injunction from Mrs. Martyn about being sure to ring if she wanted anything, Gerty hastened back to her post.

For some time May tossed on her pillows without speaking, but when the house was all silent, and the church-goers departed, she lifted her head and again called "Gerty!"

Gerty was on her knees on the rug, putting coal on the fire, thinking her own thoughts meanwhile, and wondering what she ought to say to May.

"Gerty!"

"Yes, May; I'm here."

"Have you got it?"

"Yes."

"Oh, where? oh, where?"

"In my locked-up drawer."

"Gerty," said May eagerly, "put it back. Put it back—oh, quick, quick!—before she comes—into her drawer."

Gerty did not speak for a minute, although she had thought the matter well over before, and had no doubt about the answer she was to give.

"I couldn't, May," she said at last. "Even if it were right—and I'm afraid it wouldn't be—it would be no use. We would need to be a great deal cleverer than we are to cheat Nettie Cathcart. She knows perfectly the cross wasn't in any of her drawers when she went away."

"What will I do, then?"

"I suppose *you* won't have to choose," said Gerty sadly.

May's voice rose almost to a shriek of terror as she cried, "Oh, you're not going to tell on me?"

"Nettie Cathcart must be told," said Gerty, still kneeling with her back to May, and gazing right into the fire.

"The French school!—they'll send me to the French school!" said May, beginning to writhe and sob immediately. "Miss Maria will never—never—never let me stay here no more."

Gerty had expected an outburst of weeping, and though distressed and pitiful she was not at all surprised. She went and sat down by May, and tried to caress her. "Don't lose all hope. Do you know I was once in sad trouble? It was before you ever came to school. I was thinking about it this morning. I was just your age, and

I behaved very ill, and thought I was going to be expelled. But God helped me, though I didn't deserve it."

"If Miss Cathcart knows she'll make them send me to the French school," sobbed May. "They'll send me—and it wasn't worth much, it wasn't very pretty."

Gerty, inexpressibly pained by these last words, made no answer, and May calmed down of her own accord much more rapidly than could have been expected from the violence of her crying at first. But she doubtless had derived consolation of her own from Gerty's affectionate manner, as well as from the thoughts of self-vindication which she continued to pursue; for after a little she said, almost in her usual tone,—“If it had been gold, now, like mamma's! But it's only sort of blue stone. Julia says it isn't worth much; it's only blue stone.”

“What made you take it, then?” asked Gerty, perplexed.

“Julia said I hadn't a cross, and *she* had. And I couldn't bear it, and I said I'd a prettier one. And she said I hadn't, or I'd put it on sometimes. ‘Put it on, then!’—that was what Julia said; and so I *had* to take it.”

“O May! you told your cousin a lie, and then thought you *had* to steal! But you meant to put it back, didn't you?” said Gerty, eagerly seeking some palliation for May's guilt. “You didn't mean to keep it always?”

“Why should I want to put it back?” said May, beginning to writhe again. “It's only blue stone—it isn't worth much; and Miss Cathcart's got such a many things! And *you* said I couldn't put it back without her knowing. You said that just now, Gerty!”

May's weak stupidity and her utter want of moral sense were terribly trying; but God had given Gerty great faith and patience. Still she was beginning now to see that too

great tenderness in this case would be real cruelty. She must no longer give May any chance of excusing herself; the only hope for the child was that she might be awakened to a sense of the blackness of her sin.

"We're not going to put the cross back," said Gerty, gently but firmly, "because we're going to *give* it back to the girl you stole it from."

The hysterical sobbing and crying began again afresh, trying Gerty's resolution terribly, but not making her yield.

"Hush!" she said. "Don't cry that way; you'll make yourself ill. Be quiet, and listen to me. I've something to say to you that you *must* hear."

She lay down on the bed and took May in her arms, holding her fast, and speaking in that tone of suppressed earnestness which always commands attention.

"You were frightened yesterday—May, it *might* have been—"

"Oh dear! oh dear! I'll never, never, *never* go in a cab again," May broke forth, as Gerty paused for a moment.

"We were saved yesterday," said Gerty, "but it *might* have been that we were killed. And then you would have gone before God—a liar and a thief!"

May did not speak this time. She seemed afraid even to sob, as Gerty lowered her voice still more with the last terrible words, and kept silence afterwards for a little space.

"God is very holy, God is very good," said Gerty, going on in the same tone. "May, if it *had* been, what would have become of you?"

"Don't speak about it! Don't speak about Him!" said May, with a shudder.

"There's no one else to help us," said Gerty. "If you

had died it would have been too late to pray. But God saved you ; thank Him for it, and ask Him to forgive you."

"He's angry. He's always angry!" wailed May.

"Oh no! He gave up His own Son to die for us."

"He's always angry with wicked children. Everybody always says that to me."

"He's forgiven a great many, then," said Gerty ; "as many as have asked Him, for His dear Son's sake."

"But I'm frightened—I don't know how. Ask you for me."

"*I am* asking; but ask yourself. O my dear, ask yourself! Say, 'God be merciful to me a sinner.'"

The sobs which had been suppressed burst forth now with redoubled violence, shaking the poor little body from head to foot ; but through her crying May tried hard to articulate something, and Gerty was almost sure she distinguished the words of the publican's prayer.

Then Gerty spoke no more. She was almost morbidly afraid of marring sacred words by making them too common ; besides, May was able to bear no more excitement now. She lay in Gerty's arms, and let herself be rocked and soothed like a baby, moaning if her friend changed her position, or seemed about to let her go. Gerty took to saying hymns to her at last, in a murmuring, monotonous voice, which seemed to soothe her into a restful, half-dozing state ; and if she did not heed the words, Gerty at least got comfort enough out of them for herself.

May roused up before the others returned from church, and said she felt better ; allowing Gerty to rise at last from the position in which she had been feeling very cramped and uncomfortable for some time. As Gerty moved about the room, putting it and herself tidy, May followed her with her eyes, and finally said,—“Gerty, if they send me to the

French school, you'll get your mother to send you there too. If I went alone I'd die, but I wouldn't mind so much if you were there."

It was a very silly and selfish speech, but it was the first token of affection May had ever given Gerty, and it was prized as if it had been the most touching expression of tenderness. Gerty took it very gladly, thanked God for it, and carried it about in her memory many days; hoping and praying much that this one little spark of love might kindle at last into a flame that would warm all that poor cold little heart.

Gerty stayed at home with May again in the afternoon; but before it grew dark the child got up. She was tired of bed, and she wanted to leave her room; only nobody must speak to her. The other girls, impressed by her adventure of the day before, were inclined to be kindly and compassionate; but May turned away from them all and kept close to Gerty's side, following her wherever she went.

Sunday afternoons were very different now from what they had once been at school; and the time before tea was a very peaceful one, when the elder pupils went to the schoolroom to have a prayer-meeting by themselves, while Miss Martyn read a story to the younger ones in the drawing-room. The prayer-meeting had been so long an institution, that most of the girls had forgotten how it first began; even Emily and Gerty did not often speak of the old days when they and Mary Carr had first gained permission from Miss Maria to go away with their Bibles to a room alone for a while. One girl after another had joined the little company as time went on, till now it would have been thought a strange thing if any except the very little ones had stayed away from the schoolroom on Sunday afternoon. And the meetings which had at first been full of

lonely pain to Gerty, had now grown to be among her greatest pleasures.

This afternoon May went with her for the first time. She would not stay in the drawing-room with Meta as usual—she must be with Gerty; and she took her place, sad and shivering, with the girls in the schoolroom, where every face except her own was bright. It was a very simple service to which May listened, sitting at Gerty's side. Emily Gordon conducted it this afternoon, and, raised above all shyness by the height of her duty, read and prayed with an unaffected solemnity, which was all the more impressive because it was so maidenly. There was a good deal of singing, and the voice of Nettie Cathcart, the usual leader, was scarcely missed, for Minnie could sing as easily and as freshly as a bird, and seemed to know all the hymns that had ever been set to music. And there were a few minutes for silent prayer, when the girls could lay their own secret petitions before God, and remember the needs of their old companions who were far away. Each had doubtless her own special acquaintance to think of then, but Gerty's mind generally turned to Mary Hays in her Eastern home, to Kate Mackenzie teaching and training her little brothers and sisters in the English country-town, and to Janie Leslie (never a particular friend of Gerty's, but always rather an annoyance to her), who kept her father's house in Glasgow now, and wrote occasionally to one or other of Miss Martyn's girls to tell them how rich and how gay she was.

Gerty was deeply glad to have May with her this afternoon, and carried the thought of her in her heart through all the services, praying and praising for her, whether the child did so for herself or not.

When the last hymn had been sung, and May was going

listlessly out with the rest, Minnie Gordon went and put her arm round her in her loving, impulsive way. Gerty would have come between them, but Emily held her back with a smile; and after the others had all gone they two stood together by the fire. They had scarcely spoken to each other all day, and they linked arms affectionately now; but the sympathy between them then was too deep to have need of many words.

"Let May and Minnie go," said Emily after a little. "May is looking sad, and Minnie wants to try and make her happy. Gerty dear, I'm beginning to see you were right about it. I can't expect to make my little sister good, if I don't allow her to go about doing as Jesus did."

"I believe it would be a blessing for May to be with her," said Gerty, tears starting to her eyes. "But we'll talk about it to-morrow—if it can be. At any rate, I must tell you something before you can judge."

She had no time to say more, for May reappeared, almost crying, having discovered that Gerty had not followed her when she left the schoolroom. Gerty could scarcely be sorry that she was too sad for Minnie Gordon's innocent, happy companionship to-night; but if May could only have it in the future, what a boon that would be!

What the future might bring Gerty could scarcely guess; but she was very hopeful, and took the Gordons' unexpected friendliness to May as a sign for good. Most of all, however, she drew comfort from the thought of the love that had been given her for the child—a love that made her long for further opportunities of helping her, and look with distress on the idea of a separation. God had given Gerty strength to do more for May than she had ever done before, and she thought He would surely not give her the strength unless He meant to give her the work.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VICTORY THAT WAS GIVEN TO GERTY



ERTY had calculated that Nettie would return to school early on Monday morning, in order to practise before her music-lesson ; nor was she wrong in her calculations, for the party were just taking their seats at the breakfast-table when a cab drove up to the door, and three minutes afterwards Miss Cathcart, in trim in-door dress, entered the room with polite greetings and apologies for being late. Her place was not near Gerty's, and her attention was, as usual, devoted to French and Mademoiselle all the time of breakfast ; but Gerty watched her gravely and wistfully, and May sat and shivered in her seat opposite Nettie.

Afterwards, when the governesses and girls departed *en masse* for the schoolroom, where they were to be told off to their several classes and duties, Gerty behaved in a very singular way. Having accomplished about half of her journey, she suddenly turned, and, without saying a word to anybody, made straight for the dining-room again. Miss Maria was just quitting it, and Gerty almost ran against her in her haste. She was seeking Miss Maria, but had not expected to find her so soon, and the manner of her approach was certainly rather unfortunate. Gerty felt that she must look more like a tomboy than a young lady in the eyes of her dreadful schoolmistress ; and this idea increased

her awkwardness, and made her more abrupt than she otherwise would have been with the request she had to make.

"Why are you here, Miss Stuart?" said Miss Maria, in a tone of more frigidity than she generally used to Gerty.

"May I go to the front drawing-room to speak to Nettie Cathcart alone?" said Gerty.

"You wish to speak to Miss Cathcart alone in the front drawing-room!" repeated Miss Maria, in a tone which seemed to say, "It is scarcely possible you are serious in making such an audacious proposal!"

In truth, Miss Maria would have made very short work of any one else coming to her with a similar request; but in these days she believed in Gerty Stuart as she had once believed in Mary Carr, and though it was disappointing to meet her hurrying across the lobby in this rude, unlady-like way, still the words of her pattern pupil should receive all due attention.

"I want to say something particular to Nettie Cathcart," said Gerty. "I can't do it in our bedroom, because we're not alone. This is her hour for practising in the front drawing-room. May I go to her?"

Miss Maria hesitated. It was a very unusual favour she was asked, and one that it would be sorely against her will to grant; for keeping the hours for practising unbroken was one of her pet ideas, and dire was the wrath that fell upon any girl who left her own piano, or disturbed a companion at her music. But then, on the other hand, it was possible that Gerty had some good reason for her extraordinary request, and Miss Maria was not so sure of the infallibility of her own rules and her own ideas as she had once been. She was keenly alive to the fact that the moral feeling among her pupils was much higher than it used to

be; and whatever others might think, she at least could not avoid tracing this to the influence of two little girls whom she had once said were a disgrace to the school.

"What have you to do at present?" said Miss Maria.

"I practise too—in the Blue Room," said Gerty. "If you'll please let me go, I'll not stay more than ten minutes with Nettie."

"You may go."

Miss Maria said not another word. She was stern, she might be hard, but at least there was nothing small-minded or ungenerous about her. She did not try, and Gerty knew perfectly that she never would try, to find out what was to be said in the front drawing-room. To tell the truth, Miss Maria had not much curiosity about the matter. It might be something important to herself, or it might not,—it was all the same: she had given the unusual indulgence to Gerty because she trusted her; and choosing to trust her, she did it thoroughly.

When Gerty entered the drawing-room, Nettie Cathcart stopped in the midst of a musical cascade, and held up her hands in amazement.

"I'm allowed," said Gerty, making haste to prevent the outburst of scoffing nonsense which she knew was coming. "I want to speak to you, and I've ten minutes to do it in." Then she walked straight up to Nettie, opened her hand, and displayed the blue cross.

Gerty was unprepared for the start and flush of pleasure with which Nettie rose and made a snatch at her trinket. "My dear old thing! Where in the world did you get it?" Then she suddenly turned round on Gerty with anger flashing in her eyes, and quivering in her voice. "You hid it, I suppose, and thought you were funny!"

"No, not I," said Gerty. "May Allardyce took it."

Nettie's great dark eyes opened, and her lips tightened for a moment; but almost immediately she began to smile to herself, and nodded her head slightly as she looked down at the cross. "After all, that's much more likely," said she.

At that instant she was far less provoked with May than with herself. That her cross had been stolen, she could bear (at least now it was restored) easily enough; but that she should have made a stupid mistake and lost her temper about it, was very trying indeed. She had shown a want both of penetration and of self-control in the matter, and she felt herself lowered in Gerty's eyes. "Of course, I might have known," said Nettie, smiling but annoyed. "It was just what might have been expected."

Gerty made no answer, but stood leaning on the piano, watching the other girl as she toyed with the cross and its ribbon.

"Well, all's well that ends well, as our late good Catherine would have said," was Nettie's next remark. "I've got back my piece of trumpery, and we'll all get rid of that tiresome child—"

"Oh no!" said Gerty then, coming nearer and speaking in an imploring tone. "Oh no!"

"Now, don't say you aren't glad to wash your hands of her, because that will be so difficult to believe!"

"I've never done what I ought to have done for her," said Gerty. "If I had, she surely never would have done this. But I want to try now."

"Oh, rubbish!" said Nettie Cathcart. "Every one knows you would have made her good if it could have been done; but it isn't in her. She's been a dead weight on you for ever so long. You'll be twice as happy when she's gone. We'll try to manage to get Mademoiselle into our room; you've no idea what an amusing little soul she is."

"May must go then?" said Gerty, in a tone almost of despair.

Nettie looked at her in astonishment. "I should suppose so. What does Miss Maria say? Hasn't she been told?"

"No, that part lies with you," said Gerty; and she rapidly related the events of Saturday, giving no comments, only facts.

"It's a queer story," was all Nettie said when the end came.

"May's sorry," said Gerty, standing quite close to Nettie, and meeting her sparkling eyes and half-incredulous smile with earnest, nearly tearful gravity. "I'm sure May's sorry. Forgive her."

"I haven't much chance of doing anything else," was the somewhat enigmatical reply.

"I've done very wrong," said Gerty eagerly. "It's for myself mostly I ask you. Give *me* another chance!"

"How am I to do that?"

"Don't get May Allardyce expelled."

"Oh! I'm not going to demean myself by turning tell-tale," said Nettie Cathcart. "You needn't be afraid of that. I'm not a good girl, you know. And if *you* didn't tell in the first excitement, when it would all have come naturally, I could scarcely do it in cold blood. It seems to me you've lost a good chance of getting rid of the little pest; but you've left none—not the ghost of a chance to me! After all, it's more your affair than anybody else's; May will give me no trouble—except it be locking up my things a little more carefully."

"Oh, thank you!" said Gerty in delighted gratitude. "Will you let me kiss you? You've made me very happy."

"It takes little to make children happy, I've always

heard," said Nettie, kissing and patting Gerty kindly enough. "And you're not going to cut May Allardyce yet? Will you do it the next time she steals something?"

"She'll never do it again, I think," said Gerty, shaking her head. "But I must never cut her."

"You do stick like a burr to people when you once get hung on," said Nettie; and Gerty laughed.

"I think that's a compliment. Did you mean it for one?"

"Perhaps I did," said Nettie, as she pulled and twisted her cross meditatively. "Gerty, if you had a Tom, you'd stick to him?"

"I think I would."

"Well, sometimes I think I will too," said Nettie; "but I'm not at all sure."

And neither, to tell the truth, was Gerty at all sure of her. Liking this girl as she undoubtedly did, closer acquaintance was nevertheless only showing her that never was girl less to be depended on. This very day, she had come to appeal to Nettie utterly unable to guess what her conduct would be; the chances for or against May seemed pretty equal. It is true she had known that Nettie, without much reference to other people or their wishes, would put herself in the position where she thought she looked best; but Gerty Stuart's ideas of what was becoming were so utterly foreign to Nettie Cathcart's, that knowing this was not much help. It had happened, however, that all had gone well; Nettie had chosen to be scornfully generous, and Gerty was too delighted and grateful to have much time to spend in sentimental speculations about the fate of cousin Tom in the Australian bush.

May did not appear at any of her classes that morning, and Gerty only heard of her incidentally through Meta

Campbell, who was complaining loudly to some of the day-scholars that *she* had never been allowed to lie on the sofa in the dining-room and have apples roasting at the fire for her. Meta thought that if people were really ill, bed and Gregory's mixture were the proper things for them; she did not believe in such remedies as the dining-room sofa and roasted apples; at any rate, she thought they ought to be kept for girls who said their lessons better than May Allardyce ever did. Meta was really a kind-hearted little creature, and not at all stupid, and yet how little idea she had that she, at her desk in the schoolroom, with all her lessons to do, and the prospect of nothing daintier than bread and butter for lunch, was really infinitely happier than May Allardyce making holiday on the dining-room sofa, and watching the apples at the fire!

Poor May! Gerty would fain have gone to comfort her, and tell that Nettie Cathcart had been merciful; but all forenoon that was impossible. She could only call her up to tender remembrance at odd moments, rejoicing over the comparative freedom from lessons which Mrs. Martyn had evidently determined upon for her, planning all sorts of amusements in which she counted upon the assistance of Minnie Gordon, and positively hugging the idea of a Christmas visit to Burnside for her. Surely, if she could breathe that delicious air, and enjoy the company of "mamma" and "the boys," even May Allardyce would be well, and good, and happy!

After all, it was not Gerty at all who told May she was not to be expelled. The child did indeed come to her room to make herself tidy before dinner, and Gerty was there then; but so also was Nettie Cathcart, tying on her blue cross. At sight of that May winced and made as though she would have gone; but when no one took any notice of

her (Gerty thinking it kinder not to speak until they were alone), she stole in softly, apparently hoping she was unperceived. But Nettie Cathcart was watching her in the looking-glass, and waited till she had got to a corner where retreat was impossible; then turned round on her suddenly. The hair-brush dropped from May's hands, and she stood in speechless terror, waiting what was coming.

"So you're tired of being here, and want to go to the French school!" said Nettie.

May gazed at her, fascinated and helpless, like a bird when a cat is making ready to spring.

"It's a very nice school," said Nettie, "but I doubt whether they'll take you in. Jail seems the place you're making ready for."

Still the miserable child neither spoke nor cried, only went slowly back and back into the corner with her eyes fixed on her judge. She got to the wall at last, and then she crouched down on the floor.

"If I don't have you expelled, it's only because Gerty begged you off. One more chance I give you, to see if you can grow a good girl like her. But if you take so much as a pin that isn't yours, or say a word that isn't true, nothing will save you again; go you must. Yes, hold out your hands to Gerty; she's the girl that saved you. Why she thought you worth it, she best knows."

But though May's arms were stretched out towards her friend, she dared not turn her eyes to Gerty till Nettie gave her leave.

"There she is. Ask her why she takes anything to do with you. I'm sure *I* see no reason."

Then May, looking up, repeated half-involuntarily and in a most piteous tone the question dictated to her.

"What makes you do it, Gerty?"

Gerty smiled, though the tears were in her eyes. She went to May, putting herself between her and Nettie, and she took her hand to lift her up.

"For Ada's sake, and for Christ's sake—I promised."

As the two girls drew close together and kissed, Nettie Cathcart stood and looked at them, but said never a word after that, only went out and left them alone.

Gerty Stuart is still at Miss Martyn's, and will be there for some time longer, though she has grown into a tall young lady with a long dress, and her mother is already making plans about what is to be done when she gets her dear daughter back to Burnside again. Gerty is looking forward to the home-coming too, and yet she knows she will be bitterly sorry to leave school when the time comes.

Every term brings changes at Miss Martyn's, and last midsummer Nettie Cathcart and Emily Gordon went away; Nettie to make a tour on the Continent with her friend Mrs. Marshall, and Emily to return very gladly to Laverock Hall. They both write to Gerty sometimes, and the letters are about as unlike each other as the two girls and their lives; for Emily only seems to grow sweeter and better as she grows older, and Nettie and her ways are still as tantalizing, teasing, and unsatisfactory as they used to be.

Gerty is not weighed down and perplexed by her own popularity now, though it is greater than ever, and she is the undoubted head of the school. She has learned to be very glad of her influence, esteeming it a precious legacy and a sacred trust, which it makes her very happy to use. And her work with May is much easier, though she still has often cause to be thankful for the childish wisdom which bound the promise on her with a stronger than

human tie. May has never ceased to be very provoking sometimes, but for Christ's sake, and for Ada's sake, Gerty is very patient; and the hardest is over, now that love has grown up between them. For Gerty loves May very dearly—her heart cannot doubt that any longer; and her eyes are very keen to see the child growing braver and more truthful, less peevish and discontented. And she hopes, oh how ardently! that yet in the kingdom of heaven May will look upon the tender Saviour, and the loving little girl who left her as a charge for Gerty Stuart to keep.

Minnie Gordon has taken the vacant place in the room with Gerty and May, and their chamber is the merriest one in all the house. For Minnie, having grown less childish without losing any of her gleefulness, is a most delightful companion; and Gerty has become as fond of her as even Minnie's enthusiastic nature could desire.

Gerty is no longer afraid of loving other girls too well, nor does she seek with jealous care to keep her whole heart for her first, dearest friend. She has come to see that, to the loving even more than to the loved one, all great affection is gain. Besides, she knows that however dear others may grow, no one will ever be just the same to her as Ada was.

Does she think—that little girl gone to be with Christ—how faithfully her memory and her love is kept by the friend she left behind? Eye hath not seen nor ear heard aught of the country where Ada is now; and yet I think—I am almost sure—that, glad as her life is there, she will be happier, even in heaven, when Gerty comes.

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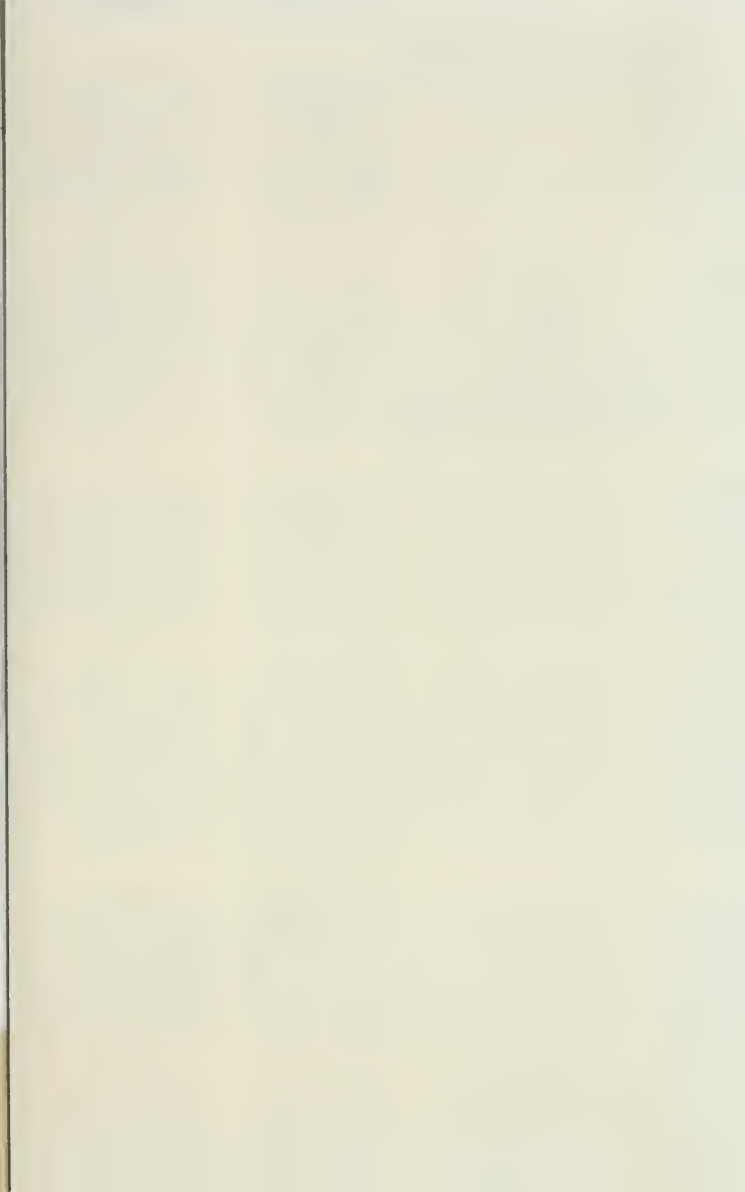
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